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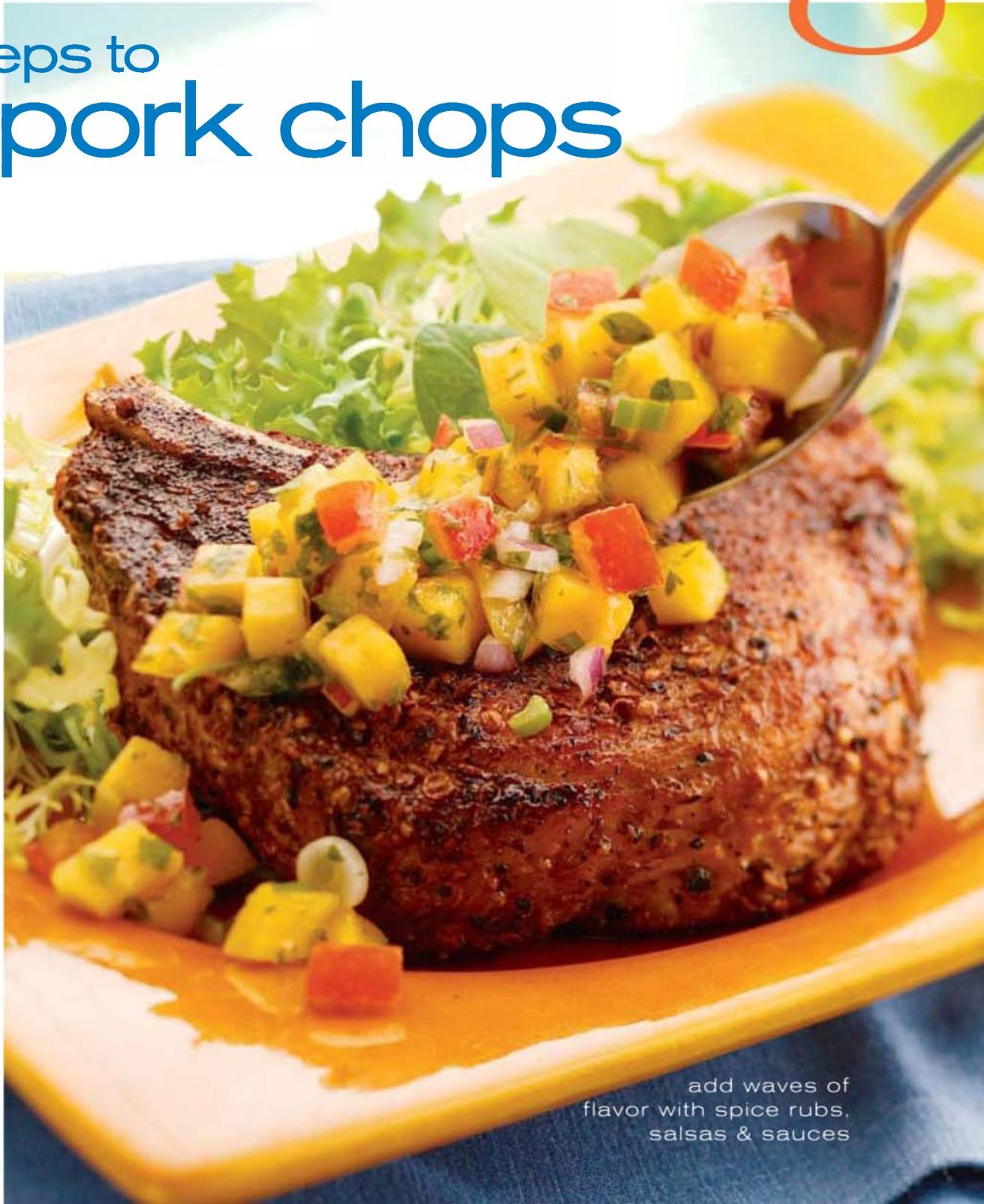
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4 easy
ways
to cook
asparagus

crisp & creamy
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how to make
a moist
chocolate
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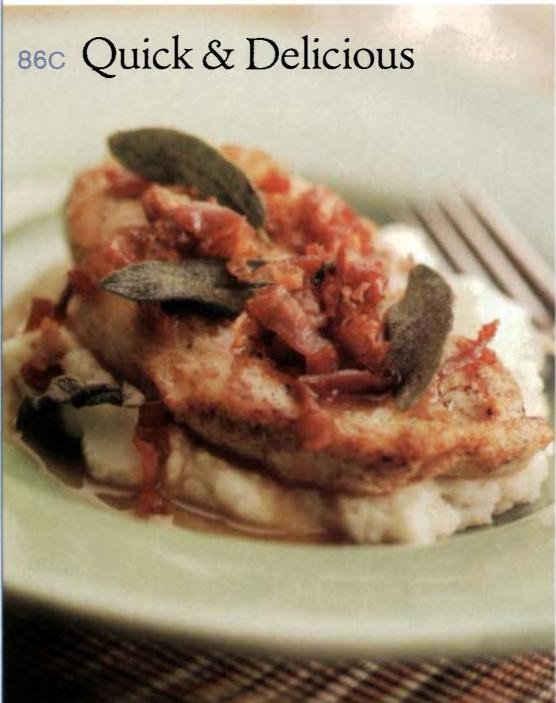
APRIL / MAY 2004 ISSUE 64



42 47

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18C 50 Favorite Tips



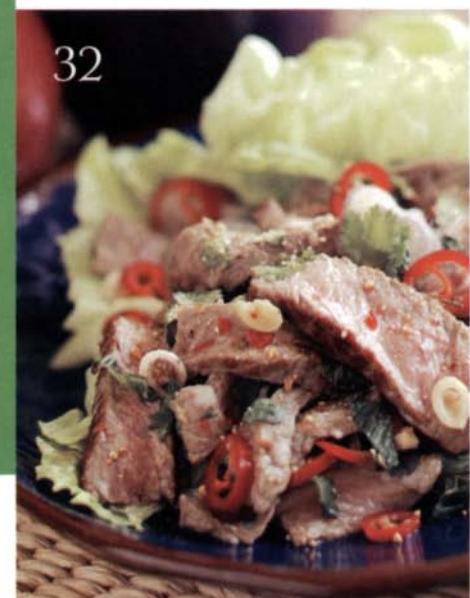
86C Quick & Delicious

UP FRONT

- 6 Index
- 8 Menus
*Jazzing up dinner,
all week long*
- 10 Letters
- 16 Contributors
- 18 Q&A
- 22 In Season
Eat your spinach
- 26 Equipment
Rotary cheese graters
- 30 Enjoying Wine
*Ten wine bargains
under \$12*
- 32 World Cuisines
Thai beef salad
- 38 Great Finds
*Rice bran oil; cheese
knife; tomato paste*



30



32

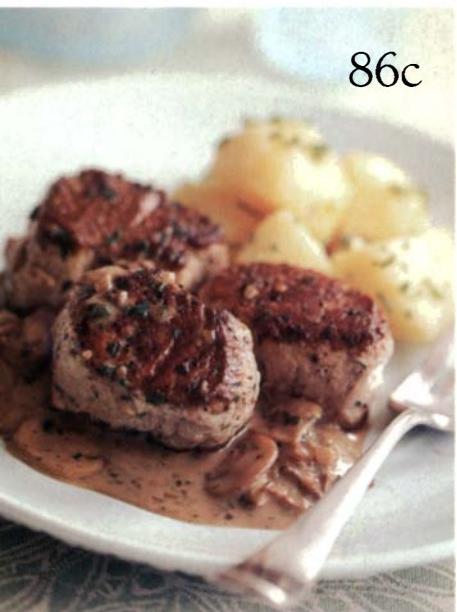
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recipes

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- ◆ Vegetarian
- ◆ Baking

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Cover Recipe

- ◆ Spicy Pork Chops with Mango Lime Salsa, 45

Appetizers

- ◆ Goat Cheese Crackers with Hot Pepper Jelly, 63
- ◆ Hoisin-Glazed Flank Steak Spirals with Carrot, Red Pepper & Scallions, 78
- ◆ Prosciutto-Wrapped Greens, 86C

Main Dishes

- ◆ Asparagus Carbonara, 86C
- ◆ Beer-Battered Fish Tacos, 71
- ◆ Chicken & Shrimp Ragoût with Curry Spices, 63
- ◆ Chicken Saltimbocca, 86C
- ◆ Chile-Rubbed Steak Tacos, 70
- ◆ Coriander-Rubbed Pork Chops with Orange Hoisin Sauce & Sherried Scallions, 46
- ◆ Grilled Chicken Tacos Alambres, 69
- ◆ Hamburgers with Watercress & Roquefort Butter, 86C
- ◆ Pork Medallions in Mushroom Marsala Sauce, 86C
- ◆ Risotto with Peas, Mint & Lemon, 86C
- ◆ Sautéed Pork Chops with Balsamic Onions, 44
- ◆ Shrimp with Red Chiles, Ginger, Garlic & Scallions, 86C
- ◆ Spicy Pork Chops with Mango Lime Salsa, 45
- ◆ Thai Beef Salad with Mint & Cilantro, 32
- ◆ Three-Cheese Soufflé, 77

Side Dishes

- ◆ Boiled Asparagus with Salsa Verde, 50
- ◆ Grilled Asparagus with Fresh Tarragon Mayonnaise, 48
- ◆ Potatoes Fondantes, 59
- ◆ Roasted Asparagus with Buttery Breadcrumbs, 49

- ◆ Sautéed Asparagus with Butter & Parmesan, 51

- ◆ Spinach & Parmesan Gratin, 22

- ◆ Three-Cheese Soufflé, 77

- ◆ Toasted Almond Rice, 64

Salads

- ◆ Spinach & Cucumber Salad with Yogurt-Mint Dressing, 64
- ◆ Thai Beef Salad with Mint & Cilantro, 32
- ◆ Sauces, Condiments & Seasonings
- ◆ Curry Spice Blend, 63
- ◆ Guacamole, 70
- ◆ Mango Lime Salsa, 45
- ◆ Pico de Gallo, 68
- ◆ Roquefort Butter, 86C
- ◆ Tomatillo Salsa, 68
- ◆ Yogurt-Mint Salad Dressing, 64

Desserts

- ◆ Bite-Size Ginger Cupcakes, 54
- ◆ Bourbon Chocolate Cake, 66
- ◆ Butterscotch Frosting, 57
- ◆ Caramel Cupcakes, 56
- ◆ Chocolate-Sour Cream Frosting, 53
- ◆ "Key" Lime Pie, 73
- ◆ Mocha Chip Cupcakes, 53
- ◆ Lemon-Cream Cheese Frosting, 55

49



66 melt-in-your-mouth bourbon chocolate cake



86c





FEATURES

42 COVER STORY

Simple Steps to Juicy Pork Chops

For moist chops with big flavor, go for deep browning and delicious rubs and condiments

by Chris Schlesinger

47 Four Ways to Cook Asparagus

Choose grilling, roasting, sautéing, or broiling for great flavor

by Janet Fletcher

52 Cupcakes

Ginger, butterscotch, and mocha mean these treats aren't just for kids

by Greg Patent

58 Skillet "Roasted" Potatoes

Try this easy method of creamy potatoes that taste like they cooked alongside a roast

by Jacques Pépin

60 DINNER WITH FRIENDS

A Savory Chicken Stew

For a relaxed night off, two chefs take it easy in the kitchen and create a menu around a do-ahead chicken ragout

by Karen & Ben Barker

67 A Trio of Soft Tacos

Corn tortillas and fillings like seared spiced beef, grilled chicken, and fried fish make these tacos authentically Mexican

by Jim Peyton

72 The Key to a Great Lime Pie

To make the best version of this creamy-tangy pie, you don't need Key limes—just juicy ones

by Becky Campbell



75



76



78

IN THE BACK

74 From Our Test Kitchen

- ◆ buying pork chops
- ◆ choosing wines to cook with
- ◆ stemming spinach
- ◆ buying tomatillos
- ◆ making a soufflé
- ◆ using hoisin sauce
- ◆ tasting yogurt

79 Advertiser Index

82 Where to Buy It

86 Nutrition Information

BACK COVER

Artisan Foods

Cake as canvas

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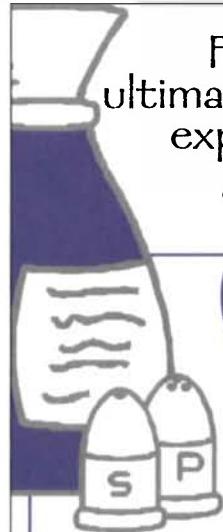
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Jazzing Up Dinner, All Week Long

If you like to cook, you don't want to save all the fun stuff for the weekends—you'd be missing five nights of great flavors if you did. But sometimes it's hard to find a delicious dish with a jazzy little twist that fits into the weeknight schedule. To the rescue come a bunch of excellent recipes in this issue. Some are one-dish wonders, while others work best with a sidekick.

We all need new ideas for entertaining friends and family, too. To keep the cooking and the entertaining fun, shake things up a bit with a taco party or a spring brunch menu starring a showy cheese soufflé.

Weeknight Duos

Hamburgers with Watercress & Roquefort Butter, p. 86C

Potatoes Fondantes, p. 53

TO DRINK: Hamburgers give you a lot of choice. Try a medium-bodied Syrah or Syrah blend, or a lighter-style Zinfandel.

Spinach & Cucumber Salad with Yogurt-Mint Dressing, p. 64

Pork Medallions in Mushroom Marsala Sauce, p. 86C

TO DRINK: Try a young Chianti or Sangiovese with good fruit and lively acidity.

Chicken Saltimbocca, p. 86C

Toasted Almond Rice, p. 64

TO DRINK: Try a Pinot Grigio with good acidity, or a light Italian red that's low on tannin, like Dolcetto.

Weekend Fun

Taco Party

Guacamole, p. 70

Beer-Battered Fish Tacos, p. 71

or

Chile-Rubbed Steak Tacos, p. 70

Pico de Gallo, p. 68

"Key" Lime Pie, p. 73

TO DRINK: Here's a fun chance to pop open a few different beers and ales and see which you like best with each dish.

Spring Brunch

Prosciutto-Wrapped Greens, p. 86C

Three-Cheese Soufflé, p. 76

Asparagus with Fresh Tarragon Mayonnaise, p. 48, or Salsa Verde, p. 50

Bite-Size Ginger Cupcakes with Lemon-Cream Cheese Frosting, p. 56

TO DRINK: Prosecco, the Italian sparkler, is dry, bubbly, and low in alcohol—perfect for brunch.

Favorites with a Kick

Goat Cheese Crackers with Hot Pepper Jelly, p. 63

Sautéed Pork Chops with Balsamic Onions, p. 44

Roasted Asparagus with Buttery Breadcrumbs, p. 49

Bourbon Chocolate Cake, p. 66

TO DRINK: A young Italian red with snappy acidity, like Barbera.

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by **FAGOR** 



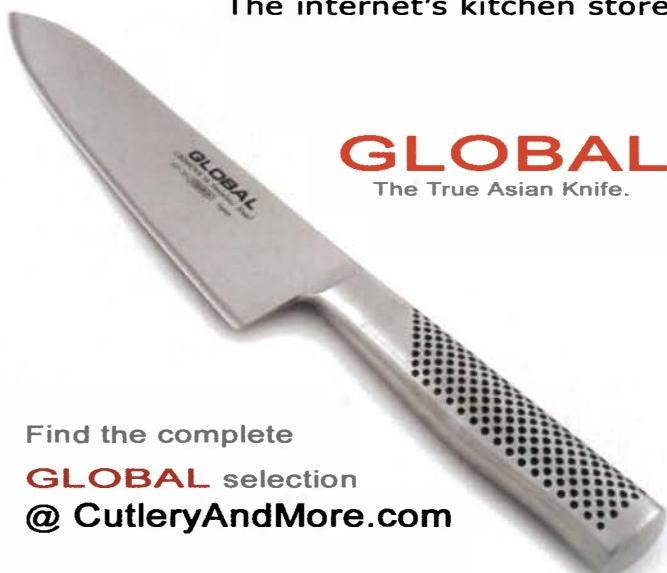
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from the editor

What's in your cookware collection?

At *Fine Cooking*, these are the kind of things we worry about: Can you find the ingredients our recipes call for in your local grocery store? Do you have the equipment needed to make the recipe? Sometimes we toss and turn at night, fretting about what will happen if someone uses a 6-ounce ramekin instead of an 8-ounce one. Because we just don't know what you're likely to have in your kitchen, we try to offer as many substitutions or alternatives as we can.

A few weeks ago, as we were working on Chris Schlesinger's pork chop article on p. 42, we wondered if most home cooks own a skillet large enough to hold four pork chops (about 12 inches wide). Curiosity got the best of us, so we took our own internal poll. Everyone on the *Fine Cooking* staff brought in his or her biggest skillet, and sure enough, even die-hards like us didn't all have 12-inch skillets (those top four in the photo below are 10-inchers). Don't worry if you don't either—there's a solution in the article.

Our next "crisis" was over a cake pan for Karen Barker's utterly delicious bourbon chocolate cake (p. 66) that baked beautifully in a 9-inch cake pan that's 3 inches deep and not so well in a standard (2-inch-deep) pan. And only one of us has a pan that size at home. But this cake is just too good not to make. Fortunately, our author came to the rescue this time, too, instructing us to make a simple parchment collar on a 2-inch pan to give the cake the climbing room it needs. It worked!

Of course we'd like to encourage you to add good-quality, versatile pieces of equipment to your collection, and to stock interesting ingredients. But we'd hate for you to get an issue of

Fine Cooking, head for the kitchen to start cooking, only to find out the dish you want to make calls for a piece of cookware that has to be mail-ordered. We don't want anything to stand between you and great cooking, so let us know if we call for things you don't have or can't find.

Getting feedback from you will help us make our recipes even more useful to you—and help us get a good night's sleep.

—Susie Middleton, editor



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Jennifer Armentrout

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EDITOR AT LARGE
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Li Agen

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR
Annie Giammattei

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Kim Landi

PHOTO COORDINATOR
Jessica Bard

TEST KITCHEN INTERN
Jeff Borofsky

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Abigail Johnson Dodge, Tim Gaiser,
Tony Rosenfeld, Molly Stevens

PUBLISHER
Martha Holmberg

SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER
Christine Rosato

MARKETING MANAGER
Ellen Kracht

SINGLE COPY SALES MANAGER
Mark Stieckman

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
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Fine Cooking

The Taunton Press, 63 S. Main St., P.O. Box 5506,
Newtown, CT 06470-5506 203-426-8171
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Editorial:

To contribute an article, give a tip, or ask a question, contact *Fine Cooking* at the address above or:

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Celebrating our tenth all year long!

We're going to be celebrating our tenth anniversary all year long, so please visit our Web site, www.finecooking.com, for some special features. We'll be showcasing more of our favorite recipes from the last ten years, including Our Top Ten Favorite Chicken Recipes, Our Top Ten Favorite Potato Recipes, and more. We'll also be profiling different members of the *Fine Cooking* staff, so you can get to know us a little better. We'll have some fun polls, and of course, all the information on America's Best Home Cook Contest (see the details on p. 19).

We'd also like to thank all of you who have written to congratulate us on our 10th anniversary; it's great to hear from you, and we've included a few of your notes here.

—*the editors*



Where did ten years go?

When I read the caption "Celebrating Ten Years of Great Cooking" on your February/March 2004 issue, I quickly went to look at issue #1 (I'm a charter subscriber) because I couldn't believe that ten years had elapsed. So I want to congratulate you on ten years of providing us loyal readers with a wonderful and beautiful magazine that has managed to hold my attention for a decade. It's always exciting when I find it in my mailbox and I read it cover-to-cover. Maybe now I'll start back at issue #1 and begin all over again! A heartfelt thanks.

—Bobbie Palmer, Miami, Florida

A trusty collection

In 1996, I found myself the recipient of a complimentary subscription to *Fine Cooking* magazine as part of my responsibilities for launching a cookware line. Over the years my collection of those magazines has traversed with me on my moves around the U.S. Sometimes they've languished in storage, but I've never parted with them. The Pineapple Upside-Down Cake (FC #19) has become a "this-is-so-amazing" staple.

Last night I opened up the March 1996 issue (FC #13), as I was searching for a new chicken pot pie recipe to try. I had the leftover chicken I had just roasted the day before, and 2 perfect cups of rich stock, actually more like demiglace. There was a cup of white wine left in the fridge, frozen peas, fresh carrots, lima beans from the Farmer's Market, etc...but the terror of making puff pastry from scratch was staring at me on p. 27. All I can say is it was *gorgeous* and a shame that I was dining alone!

Thank you for stretching my kitchen skills and making me the kind of cook who people suggest should open a restaurant!

—Terri Fritschi, via email

Well-worn issues, all in a row

I just wanted to say how much I appreciate *Fine Cooking*. Ten years ago I returned from living in Italy, and I was filled with enthusiasm for cooking. I bought the very first issue of *Fine Cooking* and proudly have a full set of issues. The illustration on the back of the latest issue (FC #63) really does resemble my kitchen —complete with well-used issues of *Fine Cooking* all in a row. Although I subscribe to a number of cooking magazines, *Fine Cooking* is the only one I could not live without.

—Jackie Scolaro, via email

from the readers

A blender for tahini, a bag for chicken

I enjoy reading *Fine Cooking*, most recently your articles on marinades for roasting chicken and on sesame tahini (FC #62). As your article noted, I found that the tahini had separated in the can. After trying to remix it with limited success, I poured the entire contents into an electric blender and blended at low speed. It came together. I returned it to the original can, measured the amount I needed for the Triple-Sesame Ginger Chicken and then blended all the marinade ingredients in the same blender.

I also used a zip-top plastic bag to marinate the chicken. I prefer to marinate in sealed bags because, by squeezing out all the air, I'm able to make sure all the pieces are well-seasoned and in constant contact with the marinade. Also, I can massage the marinated pieces on a regular basis without having to come in contact with them or the marinade.

—Bert Johnston,
Talofofo, Guam

How many nuts in an ounce?

Due to a transcription error, we listed an incorrect volume for the walnuts in the Cheddar-Cayenne Coins on p. 39 in FC #62. It should have read 1½ ounces (⅓ cup) medium-finely chopped walnuts.

A gift certificate for holiday pies

I'm not really a magazine person, but I saw your *Holiday Baking* issue and picked it up—so much useful information! Your "Make & Freeze" pie story gave me a great idea, too. I had a lot of friends and family out of town this season so for their Christmas gifts, I printed gift certificates, for one homemade pie for each of their freezers. I made about 15 certificates, made and froze the



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pies, and then friends came by to pick them up when they got back in town. Thank you for a great idea and for a wonderful magazine.

—Elizabeth Rodriguez, via email

A thinner caramel sauce

I made the caramel sauce recipe on p. 28 of the *Holiday Baking* issue (FC #54). It turned out very runny. One other person I talked with experienced the same outcome. I've consulted other similar recipes and it seems that the amount of cream called for is far too great.

—Susan Brown, via email

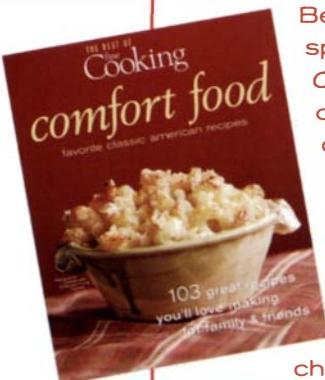
The editors reply: We're glad you wrote in about the caramel sauce, as we did get several queries about the thickness. It turns out that most cooks expect a caramel sauce to have a pretty thick consistency, which this one does not. There wasn't a mistake in the recipe; we just found the texture pleasing. It makes a nice drizzle for a plated dessert, but is still delicious on ice cream.

Check it out

You may have already spotted it on the newsstand, but you can order a copy, too, of our second

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The issue costs \$6.95, plus shipping and handling. You can also order a copy of the first issue in the series, *101 Quick & Delicious Recipes*.



Fine Cooking around the country

March 13 and 14: Visit the *Fine Cooking* booth at the **Napa Valley Mustard Festival Marketplace** in Napa, California, for cooking demonstrations and a chance to win a free subscription to the magazine. The Marketplace is a showcase of food, wine, music, and art celebrating the mustard season in Napa Valley. Taste mustards from around the world and sample wine country cuisine, wine, and craft brews. Further information is available at www.mustardfestival.org.

March and April: *Fine Cooking*'s culinary ambassador Jennifer Bushman demonstrates recipes from the magazine at **Bloomingdales** stores in various cities: March 20, 10 a.m. to noon in **Beverly Center, California**; and 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in **Century City, California**; March 21, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in **Newport Beach, California**; March 25, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the 59th street store in **New York City**; March 26, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in **White Plains, New York**; March 27, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the **Chicago (Medina)** store; March 28, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the **Chicago (Oakbrook)** store; April 3, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the **Atlanta (Perimeter)** store; and April 4, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the **Atlanta (Lenox)** store. More information can be obtained by calling the individual stores.

Through June: *Fine Cooking* is co-sponsoring, with cookware retailer **Sur La Table**, "Shop with the Chef," a weekly cooking demonstration with tastings and recipes, at the **Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market in San Francisco**. For a schedule of classes call 415-291-FARM or visit www.ferryplazafarmersmarket.com.



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contributors



Janet Fletcher

JANET FLETCHER ("Asparagus," p. 47) is a staff food writer and cheese columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, where her reporting has twice won James Beard awards, as well as a Bert Greene award. She writes frequently on food and wine for several national magazines and has written or co-written seventeen books on food and wine, including *The Cheese Course*, *Fresh from the Farmers' Market*, *Pasta Harvest* and the forthcoming *Four Seasons Pasta*, due out in May. Janet lives in California's Napa Valley.

From a career as an academic with a Ph.D. in zoology, **GREG PATENT** ("Cupcakes," p. 52) returned to cooking, his first love, when he went to work as national spokesperson for Cuisinarts, Inc., in 1982. He taught cooking classes all over the country and hosted a television series broadcast nationally on The Learning Channel. These days, having finished his latest book, *Baking in America* (winner of the 2003 James Beard award for best baking book of the year), Greg writes regularly for several national magazines and co-hosts "The Food Guys," a weekly Montana Public Radio show every Sunday morning.

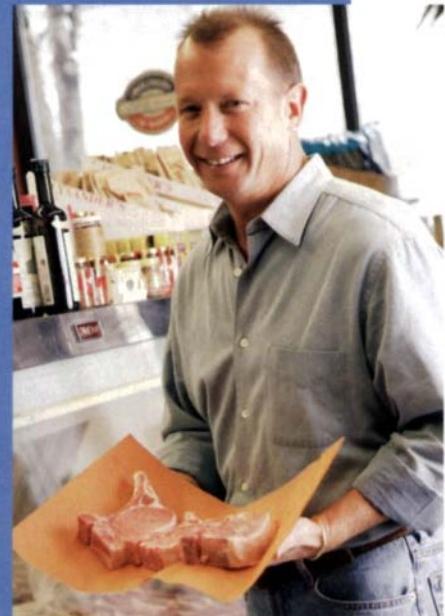
JACQUES PÉPIN ("Potatoes Fondantes," p. 58) has been charming audiences as a chef, cooking teacher, and author for the last few decades. The dean of special programs at the French

Ben Barker



16 FINE COOKING

Who better to write an article on sautéing a pork chop to perfection (p. 42) than **CHRIS SCHLESINGER**, co-author of the comprehensive cookbook *How to Cook Meat*. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Chris is the owner of the East Coast Grill & Raw Bar in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and is the co-author with John Willoughby of eight cookbooks; the most recent is *Let the Flames Begin*.



has just been released by the University of North Carolina Press.

JIM PEYTON ("Tacos," p. 67) tasted his first taco in San Diego, California, sometime in the late 1950s, and has been a devoted fan ever since. A resident of San Antonio, Texas, Peyton teaches regularly and works as a restaurant consultant on recipe and menu design. He has studied Mexican cuisine for more than 30 years and has written three books on the subject, as well as several articles about Mexican food for *Fine Cooking*.

BECKY CAMPBELL ("Key Lime Pie," p. 72) has taught and lectured extensively on cooking with tropical fruits. A home economist by training, she has worked side by side for the past 47 years with her husband, Carl, a horticulture professor and noted authority on tropical fruits from all over the world. Becky lives in Homestead, Florida.



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When sautéing, should I be tossing food in the air like chefs on television do? How do I do this without spilling half my meal on the floor?

—Mary Jewell, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

A **Molly Stevens responds:** The French verb “sauter” means “to jump,” and you literally want your food jumping around in the pan when sautéing for two reasons. For one, food that’s moving around is less likely to burn over high heat. Also, when sautéing, you’re trying to rid food of moisture. Moving it around allows moisture to evaporate more readily.

You can achieve similar results to tossing by simply shaking the pan back and forth on the burner, much the way you do when making popcorn. Stirring the food with a flat-edged wooden spoon works too. It’s also important not to crowd the pan or the food will begin to steam and not sauté.

If you want to learn to toss your food like a pro, fill a dry sauté pan with uncooked chopped carrots or other vegetables and practice off the heat. Choke up on the handle and—woop—toss and catch. After a few tries, you’ll get the hang of it.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.

Due to frequent use, my pizza stone has become a blackened mess. How can I clean it?

—Laura Hyatt,
Rocky Point, New York

A **PJ Hamel responds:** I would never clean it. The stains give it character! As for gunk—scrape it off while it’s hot with a baker’s bench knife or other metal straightedge. You can also try scrubbing (when cold) with a paste made from kosher salt and warm water, using a scrubby sponge.

What you never want to do is use soap, vinegar, or anything that you don’t want associated with your bread or pizza. The stone will absorb it and then give it off later, no matter how thoroughly you rinse.

If you’re set on keeping your stone clean, put a piece of parchment between the stone and whatever you’re baking. The parchment won’t hurt the stone’s ability to give your baked goods a great, crisp crust. (Know that parchment can char at temperatures of 400°F and higher.)

PJ Hamel is the senior editor of King Arthur Flour’s Baker’s Catalogue.

Whenever I sauté flounder fillets, the fish disintegrates as it cooks. What am I doing wrong?

—Ben Christman, Akron, Ohio

A **Leslie Revisin replies:** It isn’t you, it’s the flounder! Among flat, sole-type fish, flounder fillets have one of the softest and most delicate textures,

and that makes them a little difficult to handle. But I have a few suggestions to help keep your fillets intact.

My first tip is to fold the fillet in half rather than put it in the pan full length and flat. This gives the fillet double thickness, and the extra body makes it easier to turn in the sauté pan. The folding technique is simple: I just fold the narrow tail underneath the wide end, keeping the skin side of the fillet inside. (I do this for even the firmer sole-type fish such as gray sole. And I recommend it for baking or broiling, too.)

Second, I use a sauté pan large enough to allow at least two inches of space between each fillet. That will leave you room to maneuver when shifting the fillets in the pan or turning them over.

Also, I dredge the folded fillets in flour; this light coating not only helps hold them together but also gives a nice, lightly crisp and golden brown crust. Be sure to flour the fillets just before they go into the pan so they don’t turn gummy and sticky.

Finally, I sauté over high heat, making sure the oil is very hot (a pinch of flour will sizzle and begin to brown) before adding a fillet. If the oil or pan isn’t hot enough, the fillet will stick to the pan and start to fall apart when you try to move it.

To sauté the folded fillet, brown the wider side first since it’s the side that should face up when served. Then turn it carefully by slipping a wide spatula underneath and flipping. Lower the heat to medium and let it cook through. For thicker fillets, you may have to reduce the heat further if the bottom is browning fast and the middle is still raw.

Leslie Revisin is the author of Great Fish, Quick and, more recently, Come For Dinner. ♦

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- Shallots
- Fresh rosemary

2 pantry

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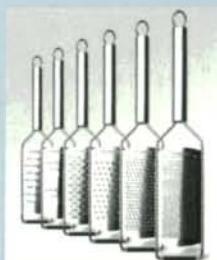


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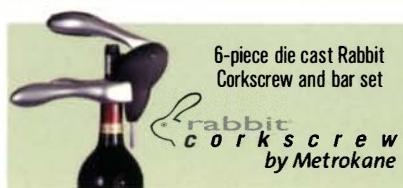


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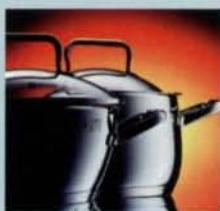
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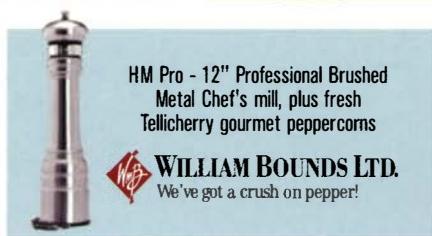
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Eat your spinach (you'll love it)

BY RUTH LIVELY

When I was a child, spinach came in a can and was always served boiled to death—how great the day when I discovered fresh spinach and learned to cook it quickly. Then I realized how versatile it is—it can be eaten by itself or as the main ingredient in a recipe, or as a secondary ingredient to add color and flavor to a dish based on grains, meat, or another vegetable. (For ideas, see the sidebar on p. 24). And yes, Popeye will be proud of you, too; spinach is high in antioxidants and extremely rich in vitamins A and C.

the freshest spinach isn't in a bag

Fresh, unpackaged spinach, whether loose or bunched, is usually fresher, and I think the flavor is superior. It's also easier to see what you're getting, as sealed plastic bags can hide slimy spinach. At the market, you'll likely find varieties with smooth leaves (flat-leaf) and crinkled leaves (Savoy). Savoy spinach tends to be darker and less fragile than flat-leaf spinach. Fresh spinach leaves will often still be attached to their roots or "crowns." Choose the perkiest-looking bunches (with no rot or yellow leaves) and untie them as soon as you

get them home. Before cooking, remove the crowns, trim any tough stems, and triple-wash the greens. The only thing worse than the crunch of grit in your teeth is the sound of it between your guests' teeth.

Both young ("baby") spinach and mature leaves (often Savoy) are sold packaged and pre-washed. Examine the bags for rot and check the packing dates. And don't count on pre-washed spinach being grit-free. I always wash it at least once and often twice.

A pound of fresh leaves will cook down to about a cup. For a side dish of cooked spinach, figure 8 ounces raw spinach per serving.



Spinach & Parmesan Gratin

Serves four to six.

This comforting, savory side dish is good with roasted or sautéed meats. Or pair it with a salad and serve it after a bowl of soup. You can also use this as a filling for crépes.

2 pounds fresh spinach, stemmed, washed, and drained

1½ cups milk or home-made or low-salt chicken broth

2 tablespoons unsalted butter; more for the baking dish

½ medium yellow onion, finely diced (about ¾ cup diced)

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

Pinch freshly ground black pepper

Pinch ground cayenne

1¼ cups (3 ounces) freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a medium (1 ½-quart) shallow baking dish.

Fill a large pot about halfway with lightly salted water and bring to a boil over high heat. Add the spinach in large handfuls, adding more as it wilts. When all the spinach is in the pot, blanch for 1 minute. Drain in a colander,

running cold water over the spinach to cool it. Squeeze the cooled spinach to remove as much liquid as possible and then chop it coarsely.

Heat the milk or broth in a small saucepan or in the microwave until hot. Set a medium saucepan over medium heat and melt the butter. Add the onion and cook until translucent and softened but not colored, about 5 minutes. Stir in the flour, salt, pepper, and cayenne and cook, stirring constantly, for 2 minutes. Slowly stir in the milk or broth, raise the heat to medium, and cook, stirring frequently, until the sauce bubbles and thickens, about 5 minutes.

When the sauce is ready, add 1 cup of the Parmigiano and stir until the cheese is melted and thoroughly combined. Take the pan off the heat and stir in the chopped spinach, mixing well. Taste and season with more salt if necessary. Scrape into the buttered baking dish, sprinkle the remaining ¼ cup Parmigiano on top, and bake until the gratin is bubbly and the top is nicely browned, 35 to 40 minutes. Let it cool for a few minutes before serving.

(For more about spinach, turn to p. 24.)

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READER SERVICE NO. 110

Great ideas for using spinach...

raw

- ❖ **For a warm spinach salad,** gently heat some olive oil with a finely minced garlic clove or a sliced shallot, add lemon juice or sherry vinegar, salt and pepper. Drizzle over spinach and garnish with diced bacon or prosciutto fried until crisp.
- ❖ **Use a balsamic vinaigrette to add both sweetness and acidity to a simple spinach salad.** Fancy it up with a garnish of toasted pine nuts and thin strips of sun-dried tomato, or with crumbled Gorgonzola and toasted pecans, or with rounds of goat cheese dredged in breadcrumbs and baked until soft and warm.
- ❖ **Use young, tender spinach leaves** in place of lettuce in sandwiches and wraps.

Flavor pairings

Good partners for spinach are things that add richness or creaminess, or acidity or pungency. Cheese, cream, and eggs have a natural affinity to spinach, adding richness and smoothing its mineral flavor. Good choices include ricotta, goat cheese, mozzarella, Cheddar, Jack, feta, melting cheeses like Swiss, Emmental, and Gruyère, and hard grating cheeses like Parmesan and Asiago. For seasonings, use lemon juice or vinegar for acidity, garlic for pungency, and nutmeg for a smooth, sweet note. Spinach is a perfect partner for shellfish and fish, and it goes well with most meats. Earthy vegetables like butternut squash work well with spinach, as do tomatoes, onions, and roasted red peppers.

chopped

- ❖ **To make creamed spinach,** stir cooked chopped spinach into a stock- or milk-based sauce thickened with a little flour and well seasoned with salt, pepper, nutmeg, and a dash of cayenne. Add a splash of cream at the end.
- ❖ **For a creamy spinach soup,** sweat chopped onions in butter, add chopped spinach and wilt, add a little flour, stir, and add hot broth. Enrich with beaten egg yolks and cream. Brighten the flavor at the end with a squeeze of lemon juice and a dash of nutmeg.
- ❖ **Fry up little fritters or pancakes** of chopped wilted spinach (well drained) and chopped scallions, seasoned with salt, pepper, and nutmeg, and bound with a beaten egg and a little flour and cheese. Serve with a dab of yogurt or sour cream.
- ❖ **For a beautiful risotto,** add chopped raw spinach when the rice is about halfway cooked.
- ❖ **To make a phyllo-wrapped spinach pie,** chop wilted spinach and scallions and blend with beaten eggs, crumbled feta, salt, and pepper. Fold spoonfuls of the mixture in buttered phyllo pastry and bake in a hot oven until golden.

sautéed or wilted

- ❖ **Wilt spinach in hot olive oil with minced garlic, salt, and pepper.** Squeeze a little lemon juice over just before serving. Or use sherry or balsamic vinegar instead and toss with toasted walnuts and blue cheese.
- ❖ **For a new take on quesadillas,** add a few leaves of wilted spinach along with chopped scallion and pepper Jack cheese.
- ❖ **Top pizza dough** with caramelized onions, wilted spinach, feta, mozzarella, or ricotta cheese, thin slices of plum tomato, and grated Parmesan.
- ❖ **Garnish a platter of cheesy polenta** with ribbons of spinach and thinly sliced red peppers sautéed with garlic.



in the garden

Spinach thrives in cool weather, but most varieties bolt when things heat up. For a long season of harvest, sow every ten days, starting in mid-spring and continuing as long as daytime temperatures are below 70°F. For early and late plantings, sow cold-resistant varieties, like 'Tyee' and 'Melody'. As temperatures climb, sow bolt-resistant types like 'Bloomsdale' or 'Teton'. (For seed sources, see Where to Buy It, p. 82).

Ruth Lively was the senior editor of Kitchen Gardener. ♦

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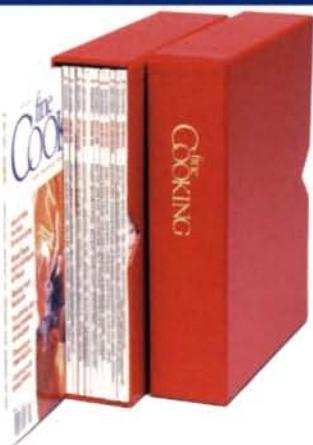
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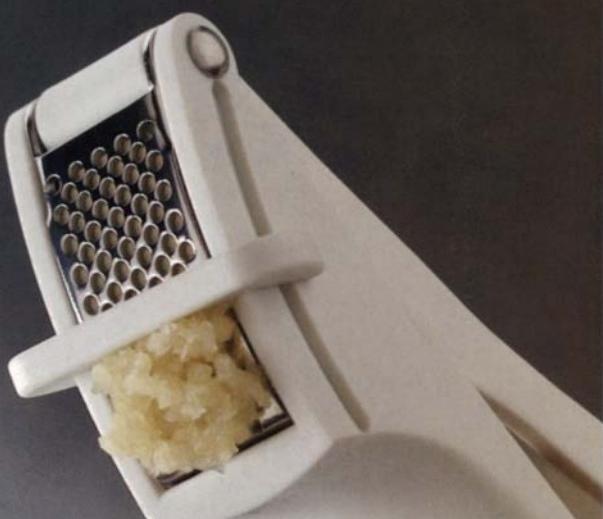
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Rotary Graters

Weeding out the good from the bad

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

The rotary grater was one of the best things that could have happened to Parmesan cheese. It helped introduce the solid wedge of Parmesan to the American dinner table by making the task of grating not only simple but also sort of fun. That in turn helped people realize that freshly grated Parmesan—the authentic Parmigiano Reggiano in particular—also tastes so much better than factory-grated cheese.

The mechanics of these tools are quite straightforward. A sharp-toothed drum is rotated by a handle as the cheese (or other food) is pressed up against it for more efficient grating. In evaluating ten rotary grater models, we found that some are significantly more effective than others. In fact, we found just three that we wanted to stock in our test kitchen.

How we ran our tests

We evaluated ten graters primarily for their ability to grate Parmigiano Reggiano, although grating nutmeg, chocolate, and nuts were also part of the tests. We considered grating efficiency, the comfort of the grip and overall feel (including leverage), the size of the chamber, the consistency of the grated cheese, and the amount of cheese left in the chamber at the end of the task. We also considered stability and ease of assembly. Our top choices are listed here; for sources, see Where to Buy It, p. 82.



Smooth grating action

Zyliss

Average retail price: \$14.99
www.zyliss.com
dishwasher safe

Pros: Testers liked this grater for its seemingly effortless, smooth grating action—not jerky at all. Little pressure is needed during grating. The handle is relatively short, a feature those with smaller hands liked, although it was less popular with one tester with large hands. The turning arm can be set on the right- or left-hand side, although for lefties, the rotating action of the turning arm is backward (rotating toward the user). A coarse grater drum is available separately, as is a measurement cup that fits on the side of the drum and comes with a lid to double as a storage container.

How fine is fine?



TOO FINE: One grater produced such feathery shreds of Parmesan that the wisps clung to one another and fell out of the drum in clumps.

TOO COARSE: Others grated the Parmesan a little too coarsely for last-minute garnishing.

JUST RIGHT: Most graters, including all those recommended here, produced what we considered fine shreds of Parmesan—our ideal.

Cons: The handle isn't particularly comfortable or slip-resistant when wet, although its overall ease of use made comfort and grip less of a pressing matter. As noted above, the handle may be too short for those with larger hands.



Effortless grating

KitchenAid

Average retail price: \$19.99
www.kitchenaid.com
dishwasher safe

Pros: The ease and sharpness of this model's grating action makes it particularly noteworthy. The chamber that holds the cheese is the largest of the three graters featured here. The rather long handle makes leverage easier at the beginning of grating a large chunk of cheese but more of a challenge when grating the last bit. It comes with two additional drums, one with coarse grating teeth and one for slicing, although these weren't included in our evaluation.

Cons: It's rather bulky, and the plastic handle doesn't offer the best grip. The turning arm fits on the right-hand side only.

So very comfortable

Oxo Good Grips Seal & Store

Average retail price: \$15
www.oxo.com
dishwasher safe

Pros: With a silicone seal around the rim of the chamber's lid and a cap that fits on the side of the drum, this grater doubles as a storage vessel for extra cheese. The cap to the drum is also handy when you want to grate a quantity of cheese (e.g., for a measured amount for a recipe) without it tumbling out as you grate. The soft, slip-resistant grip to this grater's handle and rotating knob are remarkably comfortable. The grating action is relatively continuous, producing medium-fine shreds of cheese.

Cons: The silicone seal on the chamber lid creates drag, which makes it hard to lift up the arm and creates some added resistance when pressing the arm down during grating. The turning arm sets on the right-hand side only.

When not to use a rotary grater

Most manufacturers of rotary graters tout them as effective at more than just grating a hunk of hard cheese. They're often recommended for grating nutmeg, nuts, and chocolate. After trying all these tasks with each of the ten graters evaluated, we found that rotary graters are really best suited to just grating hard cheese.

Most couldn't grate nutmeg to a fine enough consistency. We prefer a little nubby-toothed handheld nutmeg grater for that task.

Most of the graters were cumbersome at grating chocolate to use, say, for topping whipped cream on a dessert or a hot beverage. A wand-like rasp-style grater like a Microplane would be better at this.

And with a whole lot of effort, a rotary grater will grate nuts into a fine powder—useful for garnishing a dessert but little else.

The other graters we tested were made by Copco, Cuisipro (Accutec and stainless-steel models), DeLonghi (cordless electric grater), Leifheit, Microplane, and Pedrini.

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's editor at large. ♦

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Wine Bargains for \$12 or Less

BY TIM GAISER



Sauvignon Blanc

2003 Geyser Peak Sauvignon Blanc, Sonoma County, California

Price: \$9

What it tastes like: Crisp, lip-smacking pink grapefruit and gooseberry with herbal notes.

Why it's such a bargain: It's a dead ringer for good New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc for at least half the price.

Great with: Nibbles before dinner, goat cheese, simply dressed salads, salmon with herb butter sauce and a side of sautéed vegetables.

Prosecco

Mionetto Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Veneto, Italy

Price: \$10

What it tastes like: Crisp green apple, citrus, and toast; gently sparkling.

Why it's such a bargain: Sparkling wine is a great way to start the meal, but many are expensive. Prosecco delivers all the fun of bubbly at a fraction of the price.

Great with: Oysters, shellfish, smoked salmon, light nibbles.

Côtes du Rhône

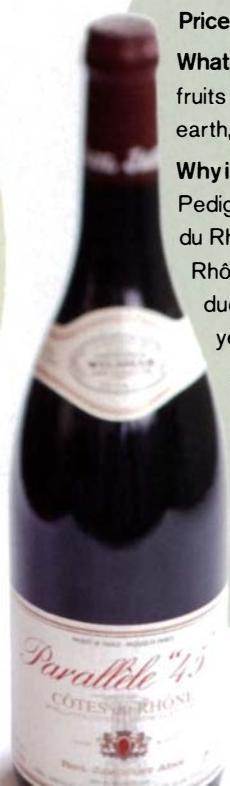
2000 Jaboulet Côtes-du-Rhône "Parallèle 45," Rhône, France

Price: \$10

What it tastes like: Ripe black fruits with notes of wild herbs, earth, and just a touch of oak.

Why it's such a bargain: Pedigree. This simple Côtes du Rhône hails from one of the Rhône Valley's very best producers. The quality shows, yet the price is modest.

Great with: Meat stews, grilled beef and pork, and meat-based pasta dishes.



Merlot

2001 Blackstone Merlot, California

Price: \$10

What it tastes like: Rich plummy fruit and soft tannins.

Why it's such a bargain: One of the best when it comes to good Merlot for not a lot of money. An instant crowd-pleaser.

Great with: Grilled salmon or swordfish; soft enough to sip before dinner.



Riesling

2003 Mönchhof Estate Riesling, Mosel, Germany

Price: \$12

What it tastes like: Crisp, green apple, peach, and lemon-lime flavor notes with a hint of mineral. Light (only 9% alcohol) and delightful.

Why it's such a bargain:

This is one of the great white wine values in the world. The grapes grow in one of the best and most spectacular vineyard sites in Germany.

Great with: "Problem" foods: salads with intensely flavored vinaigrettes, asparagus, artichokes, and egg-based dishes. (Low alcohol and high acidity make this possible.)



Rosé

2002 Bonny Doon Vin Gris de Cigare, California Pink Wine

Price: \$10

What it tastes like:

Refreshing, strawberry, lime-zest, and floral flavors and aromas.

Why it's such a bargain:

Values in pink wine are hard to find because the good ones can be pricey, and the inexpensive ones can taste like soda pop.

Great with: Almost any picnic fare or light meal, from roast beef sandwiches to cold chicken to salads. Delicious on its own, in warm weather.



Shiraz

2002 Rosemount Estate Grenache-Shiraz, Australia

Price: \$8

What it tastes like: Juicy, ripe berries, red licorice, and baking spices—yum!

Why it's such a bargain: This delicious, inexpensive wine is really easy to drink. A great one to uncork for weeknight dinners.

Great with: Meatloaf, burgers, pizza, spaghetti with red sauce, roast chicken.

Chardonnay

2001 Chateau St. Jean Chardonnay, Sonoma County

Price: \$12

What it tastes like: A balance of succulent apple-pear flavors with creamy spice notes and not too much oak.

Why it's such a bargain: There's an ocean of Chardonnay on the market, but not all of it delivers the goods. This one does, for far less than many other high-profile brands.

Great with: Grilled fish with rich sauces; roasted chicken marinated in lemon, rosemary, balsamic vinegar, mustard, or a combination.



Malbec

2001 Altos las Hormigas Malbec, Mendoza, Argentina

Price: \$11

What it tastes like: Plums, cherries, and notes of violet, green herb, earth, and wood.

Why it's such a bargain: In a country where beef is king, Malbec is the drink of choice. It's one of the world's great red wine values, too.

Great with: Any red meat; full-flavored dishes with tomato or meat-based sauces.

Pinot Grigio

2002 Campanile Pinot Grigio, Friuli, Italy

Price: \$9

What it tastes like: Zesty pineapple, mango, green apple, and citrus; mineral notes, too.

Why it's such a bargain: Lately Pinot Grigio has been all the rage with white wine drinkers, but many are dull. This one has lots of personality and a small price tag.

Great with: Smoked salmon and trout, fresh shellfish, or lightly prepared fish like sole with citrus-based sauces.



Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier. ♦

A Vibrant Beef Salad from Thailand

BY MAI PHAM

When I'm in the mood for something refreshing and satisfying, nothing compares to a Thai salad, or a *yam* (pronounced YUM). Whether it's the minty beef salad shown at left, or a traditional green papaya salad, or any of the dozens of other varieties of Thai salads, the sweet-salty-sour flavors of a *yam* are deliciously addictive. When I'm in Thailand, I can't pass by a street vendor who's selling them, and back home in Sacramento, I rarely go a week without making one.

Thai salads differ from the concept of a traditional Western salad in a few notable ways. First of all, they don't depend on a big mound of greens. Instead, one ingredient is usually the star—it could be fish, chicken, or beef, or a vegetable or fruit like green mango—and a cast of supporting ingredients are chosen for color and contrasting textures and flavors. (See p. 34 for more on Thai salad ingredients.) Dressings for Thai salads are usually made without oil and are assertively seasoned with lime juice, fish sauce, sugar, and often hot chiles, giving the *yam* its classic flavor profile and distinctive character.

Typically, Thai salads are served with cabbage leaves or greens and enjoyed either as a snack or as a component of a larger meal. But the beef salad I'm introducing to you here is so quick to make that it would be a natural for a weeknight supper, served alongside a bowl of steaming jasmine rice.

(For more about Thai salads, turn to p. 34.)

Ground Toasted Rice

This works with any type of rice, but the flavor is more nutty and interesting with sticky (also called glutinous) rice (see Where to Buy It, p. 82). It keeps for at least two weeks in an airtight container, but the flavor is best when freshly made.

2 tablespoons uncooked sticky rice

Turn on the exhaust fan and put the rice in a small, dry frying pan over medium heat. Cook, stirring frequently, until the grains are toasted and golden, about 10 minutes (the rice may smoke). Let cool for a few minutes and then grind into a coarse powder in a spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle.



Thai Beef Salad with Mint & Cilantro

Serves two as a first course or a light main course, served with rice.

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 1 small clove garlic
- 1 fresh red hot chile (like a red jalapeño), stemmed, cut in half crosswise (not seeded)
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1½ tablespoons fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons very thinly sliced lemongrass (from 2 stalks; remove the tough outer leaves and slice the tender white core)
- 1¼ teaspoons light brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon red chile flakes

FOR THE STEAK:

- ½ tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1-inch-thick beef strip steak (also called New York strip), 9 to 10 ounces
- ¼ cup thinly sliced shallot rings (from about 2 medium shallots)
- ¼ cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves, roughly chopped
- 3 tablespoons roughly chopped cilantro leaves and stems
- ½ to 1 tablespoon ground toasted rice (optional; see the recipe at right)
- Iceberg lettuce leaves for serving

Make the dressing: Using a chef's knife, mince the garlic and one of the chile halves and then scrape them together against the

cutting board with the flat side of the knife until they make a coarse paste (you can also do this in a mortar and pestle). Put the paste in a small bowl. Slice the remaining chile half into thin rings and add it to the paste, along with the lime juice, fish sauce, lemongrass, brown sugar, and red chile flakes. Stir well and set aside.

Cook the steak: Heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium high heat. Sear the steak until it is well browned on one side, 5 to 6 minutes. Flip and cook until the second side is dark brown and the meat is medium rare (touch the steak or cut into it to check), another 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board and let rest for 5 minutes. Slice the steak thinly and then cut into bite-size pieces.

In a medium bowl, combine the beef (and any accumulated juices), shallots, mint, and cilantro. Stir the dressing and pour it on top. Toss gently. Add the ground toasted rice, if using, and toss.

Transfer the beef to a platter and serve immediately with the lettuce leaves, or plate individual servings with a portion of beef cradled in a few lettuce leaves.



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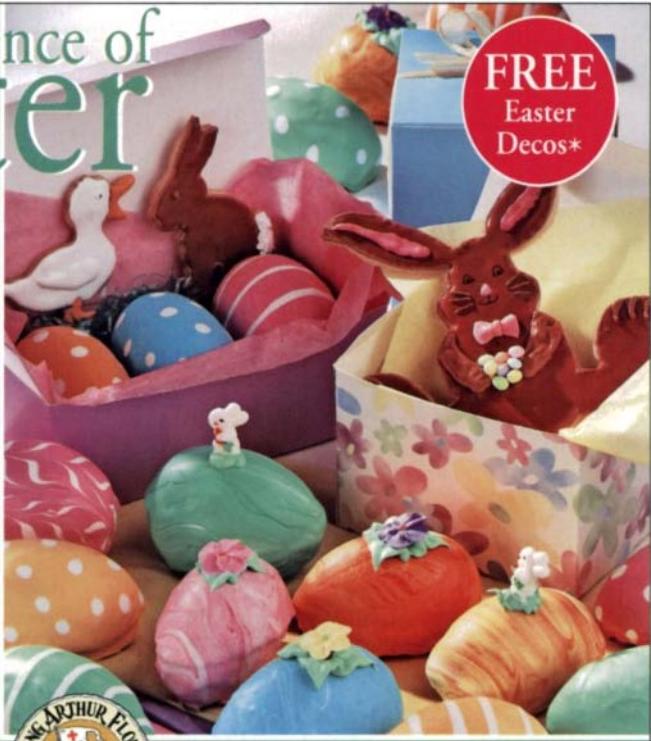
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Lemongrass

Lemongrass gives a delicate citrusy fragrance and flavor to dishes. Thai cooks use it prolifically in salads, curries, marinades, broths, and soups.

Lemongrass is sold in supermarkets, but Asian markets tend to carry better quality stalks. Choose the freshest, heaviest, and most tender stalks—heft is a good sign of moisture. Avoid those that are dried at the edges. Store lemongrass in a plastic bag in the vegetable bin of the fridge, where it should stay fresh for two to three weeks. If you don't use it all within that time, freeze it.

To use lemongrass, peel off and discard the outer two or three layers of the stalk until you get to the tender core. Then cut off 5 or 6 inches of the woody top (reserve them to infuse a soup or stew). How you cut the lemongrass depends on how you plan to use it:

- ❖ For salads, slice the stalk into very thin rings.
- ❖ For marinades, chop the rings into a fine mince or pound it in a mortar.
- ❖ For curries, stews, or broths, cut the stalk into 2- or 3-inch pieces. Bruise the pieces with the back of a knife or a pestle and add them to the pot.

tip: You can freeze lemongrass. Prepare the stalks as you would for cooking—in short lengths, in rings, or minced—and freeze in small zip-top freezer bags. It will keep for four to five months.



Mint and cilantro

Without these herbs, Thai beef salad wouldn't be nearly as lively and refreshing. In Thailand, fresh mint, particularly spearmint, is harvested young, when the leaves are no bigger than a penny. The whole upper sprigs are used, stems and all. Likewise, Thai cooks buy cilantro when it's still a young plant, no taller than 6 inches, and they use the entire plant, including the roots, which often go into soups. The stems and small flowering buds of cilantro are even more flavorful than the leaves. Thai cooks aren't shy about quantity when using fresh herbs, especially in salads. A typical salad for two might call for more than a cup of mixed fresh herbs.



Ground toasted rice

The simple technique for toasting dry rice on the stovetop (see p. 32) adds a nutty crunch to beef salad and other dishes. To make it, you cook sticky rice, also called glutinous rice, in a dry skillet set over moderate heat until the grains turn light golden. Then you grind it into a coarse meal (a coffee grinder works fine). Ground toasted rice is also used as a binder and flavor enhancer in Southeast Asian sausages, and in Vietnam, it's added to shredded pork and fermented fish. In the recipe on p. 32, the rice adds an unexpected texture to the beef salad. It's reminiscent of finely chopped nuts but with a more subtle flavor and a harder crunch. Most people love it, but the salad is also delicious without it.

Mai Pham, the chef and owner of Lemon Grass Restaurant in Sacramento, is the author of The Best of Vietnamese & Thai Cooking and Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table. ♦

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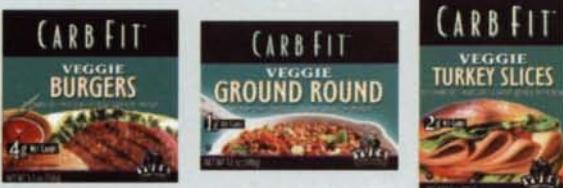
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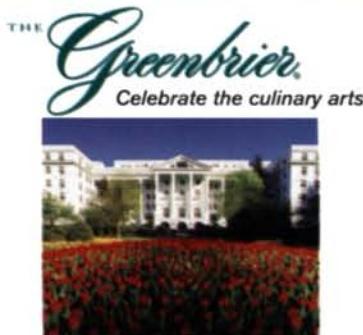
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Tomato paste on demand

We've all used a tablespoon of tomato paste and then wondered what to do with the rest of the can. Amore's resealable tubes solve this dilemma, ensuring that tomato paste is never wasted. We tried this paste against several canned supermarket brands and found that the Amore paste was thicker, with a more vibrant, pure tomato flavor. For a flavor twist, try the sun-dried tomato version. *Amore tomato paste, 4.5 ounces, \$3.99, and sun-dried tomato paste, 2.8 ounces, \$5.98, at Todaro Bros. (www.todaro-bros.com; 877-472-2767). Available at many grocery stores, too.*



A pan for perfect poached eggs

If you've never considered making eggs Benedict for a crowd, you just might if you get ahold of this pan. We loved that it poached several perfectly shaped eggs at a time—and that the eggs were easy to remove from the nonstick cups. And you don't need to use this pan for eggs only—lift off the lid that holds the egg cups and use the saucepan underneath on its own. *4-cup (\$39) or 6-cup (\$55) egg poacher at Williams-Sonoma (www.williams-sonoma.com; 877-812-6235).*

Blooming green tea "anemones"

We steeped these aromatic Chinese green tea "anemones" in wineglasses so we could watch them transform to resemble their marine namesakes.

We loved the dramatic display and the assertive, earthy flavor of the rosettes, which are simply tea leaves tied into bundles.

The tea didn't become overpowering as the leaves steeped, so if you like, you can keep an anemone in your glass or cup while you sip. Enjoy it as you would any tea. *\$25 for 1/4 pound at In Pursuit of Tea (866-878-3832; www.inpursuitoftea.com).*



Rice bran oil holds up to high heat

This oil, from the California Rice Oil Company, has a 490°F smoke point, higher than that of canola, peanut, or grapeseed oil. We tested it while sautéing chicken breasts and searing beef, and it held up well to the high heat. With its slightly nutty flavor, it's a good choice for vinaigrettes, too. But it's not just versatile—it's also hypoallergenic and high in antioxidants.

A 500ml bottle is \$6.99 at www.californiariceoil.com; 866-742-3645.



Photos: Scott Phillips



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Modern and sleek, this cheese knife doesn't just look good, it slices soft cheeses easily, too. It's sharp, lightweight, solidly constructed, and comfortable to grip. The square cutouts in the blade minimize sticking and also relieve pressure on the cheese (so you're less likely to squash it), and slices of Brie and

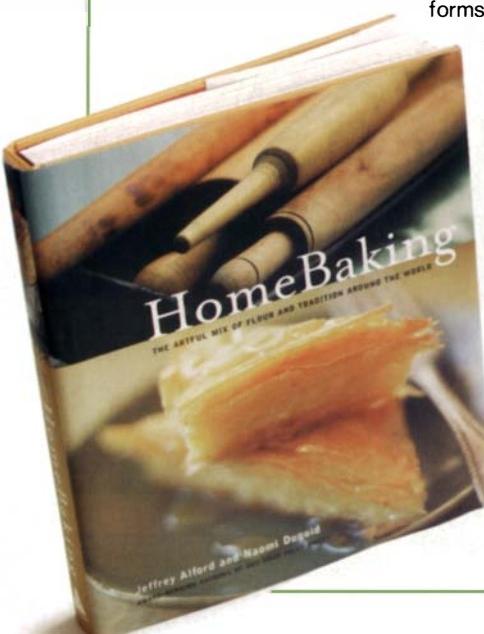
Camembert are more even. *Global 14cm cheese knife, \$54.99 at Professional Cutlery Direct (www.cutlery.com; 800-859-6994).*

A book for bakers with a taste for adventure

Home Baking: The Artful Mix of Flour and Tradition Around the World (Artisan, \$40), by Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid, is so rich with people, places, and stories that you might be tempted to spare this extraordinary book from kitchen smears and splotches. But that would be a mistake. The globetrotting authors' easy-to-follow recipes are too good to miss. Some, like savory Bangkok waffles with dried shrimp and cilantro or cardamom-scented Persian butter cookies, infuse familiar

forms with exotic flavors, while other recipes are winning takes on homey classics. The apple pie is a simple delight: the pastry needs no rolling; half is pressed into a pan for the crust and half is crumbled over the apple filling. The point here, as in all the recipes, is not to fuss but to take pleasure in making something wonderful to eat.

—Kimberly Y. Masibay,
associate editor



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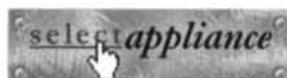


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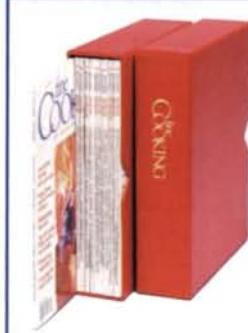
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Simple Steps

For moist chops with big flavor, go for deep browning and add delicious rubs and condiments

BY CHRIS SCHLESINGER

Growing up in the South, I could depend on being served pork one way or another at almost every meal. For the kids, bone-in pork chops were our favorite. I loved that bone and the delicious bits of meat that clung to it. That was back when pork tasted like something—it had fat and, consequently, a whole lot more juicy flavor. I'm still a big fan of pork, but cooking today's lean pork requires some different flavor-boosting strategies, on the stovetop and off.

Brown for flavor. The best way to deal with modern pork's lack of flavor is to cook it properly. That starts with browning it. Browning is flavor—deep, rich flavor. To get good browning, you'll need to cook over medium-high heat (or even higher if your stovetop's heat tends to run low). But such a strong heat can quickly dry out a lean pork chop, so you have to be vigilant not to over-cook it. Pork just isn't as forgiving as a steak that way.

The thicker the chop, the juicier

You'll find it worth your while to find a market that carries thick chops— $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick—which are better at holding their juices. One-inch-thick chops will work, too; you just have to keep a close eye on them since they'll cook through quickly. (For more on which cut to



start with thick pork chops

Thick chops ($1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick) are less apt to dry out during cooking. Brian Fuller of John Dewar's butcher shop in Newton, Massachusetts, cuts chops to order for author Chris Schlesinger.

to Juicy Pork Chops



brown the first side well

To make up for pork's mild flavor, be sure to sear the first side to a deep brown. It's all right if the second side doesn't brown as deeply as the first side before the chop is done.



check for a hint of pink

To check for doneness, cut a small slice in the chop about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch away from the bone. Take the chops out of the pan when there's still a hint of pink (as in the inset photo). Carryover heat will cook the pork to perfect doneness.



Sautéed Pork Chops with Balsamic Onions

Serves four.

- 3 tablespoons olive oil; more if needed
- 1 large red onion (about 13 ounces), cut in half and thinly sliced crosswise
- 4 bone-in center-cut pork chops (1 to 1½ inches thick)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt; more to taste
- 2 heaping teaspoons coarsely ground black pepper; more to taste
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a very large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring frequently, until soft and caramelized, about 20 minutes (if the onions start to burn, reduce the heat to medium low). Transfer the onions to a bowl and set aside.

Pat the pork chops dry with paper towels and rub both sides with the salt and pepper. Return the pan to the burner, add the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and increase the heat to medium high until the oil is hot but not smoking. (If you don't have a sauté pan large enough to fit the chops without crowding, use two smaller sauté pans, heat 1½ tablespoons olive oil in each, and cook two chops in each.) Cook the chops until well browned on one side, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn and cook the other side until the meat is done, 2 to 4 minutes. (If they start to burn, turn down the heat slightly.) To check for doneness, make a small cut near the bone (see the photo on p. 43) and look inside—the pork should have a hint of pinkness. If it's still red, cook for another minute and check again. Transfer the chops to a plate, tent with foil, and let rest for 3 to 5 minutes before serving.

Meanwhile, put the pan back over medium heat and add the balsamic vinegar and caramelized onions (if you used two pans for the chops, use just one for the onions). Simmer, scraping the pan with a wooden spoon, until the vinegar is reduced enough to just coat the onions, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the thyme and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately with the pork chops.

choose, see From Our Test Kitchen on p. 74.)

Even with good thick chops, it's crucial to keep the cooking time brief. I cook them long enough on the first side to get them well browned. Then I flip them and cook until they're just done, usually another two to four minutes. The second side might not brown as deeply, but that's fine. The best way to test for doneness is to make a small cut into the chop, about ¼ to ½ inch away from

the bone. When the meat is still slightly pink (see the far right photo on p. 43), remove it from the pan. It will continue to cook through without drying out in the few minutes of resting time before serving.

Spicy rubs, mango salsa, and more.

Good browning is a start, but to be sure that my chops never fall short, I add rubs packed with plenty of salt and pepper and quick-to-prepare condiments, all with big flavors and all terrific with pork.

tip Crowding the pan will compromise flavorful browning. A 12-inch skillet is ideal for these recipes. If you don't have one, or if your chops are large, use two sauté pans instead.

"I like to add layers of contrasting and complementary flavor when I'm serving chops. All the recipes here include a quick condiment or side with big flavors."



Spicy Pork Chops with Mango-Lime Salsa

Serves four.

FOR THE SALSA:

- 1 ripe mango, pitted, peeled, and cut into small dice
- 2 plum tomatoes, seeded and cut into small dice
- 1/4 cup small-diced red onion
- 2 scallions (white and light green parts), thinly sliced
- 3/4 cup loosely packed, roughly chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/4 cup fresh orange juice
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1/2 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
- Kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon peanut or canola oil

FOR THE CHOPS:

- 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon freshly cracked coriander seeds
- 1 tablespoon ground dried chile (I like chipotle, but ancho or New Mexico will work, as will a mild chili powder)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly cracked black pepper
- 4 bone-in center-cut pork chops (1 to 1 1/2 inches thick)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil; more if needed

Make the salsa: In a small bowl, combine the mango, tomatoes, onion, scallions, cilantro, orange and lime juices, and Tabasco. Toss gently to combine. Season with salt to taste. Drizzle with the oil and gently toss again.

Cook the pork chops: Combine the cumin, coriander, ground dried chile, salt, and pepper in a small bowl. Pat the pork chops dry with paper towels and rub each side evenly with the spice mixture. Heat the olive oil in a very large sauté pan over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. (If you don't have a sauté pan large enough to fit the chops without crowding, use two smaller sauté pans, heat 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil in each, and cook two chops in each.) Cook the chops until well browned on one side, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn and cook the other side until the meat is done, 2 to 4 minutes. (If they start to burn, turn down the heat slightly.) To check for doneness, make a small cut near the bone (see the photo on p. 43) and look inside—the pork should have a hint of pinkness. If it's still red, cook for another minute and check again. Transfer the chops to a plate, tent with foil, and let rest for 3 to 5 minutes before serving with the salsa.

how browning works

The delicious browning that occurs when pork chops are sautéed results from a complex sequence of reactions between the meat's proteins and its natural sugars. Known as the Maillard reaction, this form of browning takes place only at high temperatures (above 300°F). Moisture in or around the meat will inhibit the reaction (since the water won't get hotter than 212°F). That's why it's important to pat the chops thoroughly dry with paper towels before cooking them.



Coriander-Rubbed Pork Chops with Orange Hoisin Sauce

Serves four.

FOR THE SAUCE:

- 1/4 cup hoisin sauce (see p. 78 for brands)**
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed**

FOR THE PORK CHOPS:

- 4 bone-in center-cut pork chops (1 to 1 1/2 inches thick)**
- 1/4 cup toasted sesame oil**
- 3 tablespoons freshly cracked coriander seeds**
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt**
- 1 tablespoon coarsely ground white or black pepper**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**

FOR THE SCALLIONS AND PEPPER:

- 6 scallions (white and light green parts), thinly sliced lengthwise into julienne strips**
- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and thinly sliced lengthwise into julienne strips**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh ginger**
- 3 tablespoons dry sherry**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper**

Make the sauce: In a small bowl, stir the hoisin sauce, rice vinegar, and orange juice concentrate until well mixed.

Cook the chops: Pat the pork chops dry with paper towels and rub both sides with 2 tablespoons of the sesame oil, the coriander, salt, and pepper. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons sesame oil and the olive oil in a very large sauté pan over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking. (If you don't have a sauté pan large enough to fit the chops without crowding, use two smaller sauté pans, divide the sesame and olive oils between them, and cook two chops in each.) Cook the chops until well browned on one side, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn and cook the other side until the meat is done, 2 to 4 minutes. (If they start to burn, turn down the heat slightly.) To check for doneness, make a small cut near the bone (see the photo on p. 43) and look inside—the pork should have a hint of pinkness. If it's still red, cook for another minute and check again. Transfer the chops to a plate, tent with foil, and let rest for 3 to 5 minutes before serving.

Make the garnish: Put the scallions, bell pepper, and ginger in the sauté pan over medium-high heat. (If you used two pans for the chops, use just one for the garnish). Cook, stirring constantly, until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Add the sherry; cook for another 30 seconds. Brush each chop generously with the sauce, top with the vegetables, and serve.

Chris Schlesinger is the co-author of *How to Cook Meat*. ♦

four ways to cook asparagus

BY JANET FLETCHER

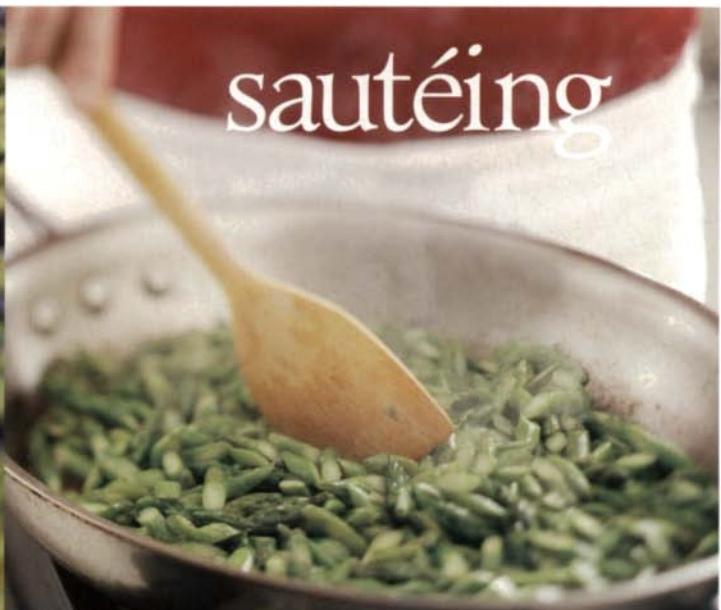
Just about the time I get tired of kale and parsnips, the first asparagus shows up in the markets. Its arrival signals that the seasons are shifting and the cold ground is coming back to life. Throughout the spring, I prepare asparagus several times a week, but

I vary the cooking method. By alternating techniques, I can serve asparagus again and again without anyone growing bored.

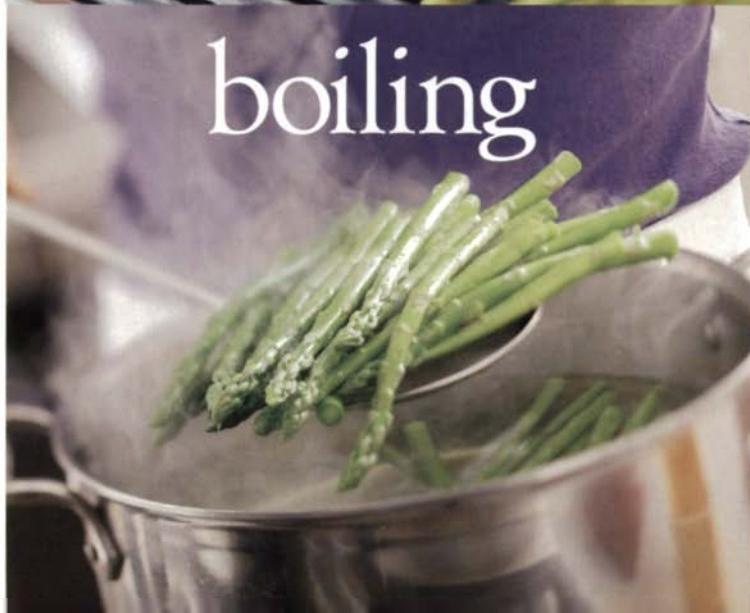
To cook asparagus, I use both dry- and moist-heat methods. Grilling, roasting, and sautéing, all dry-heat methods, help preserve flavor because little or none is lost to the cooking liquid. But for large, meaty asparagus spears, I do like boiling, which is, of course, a wet-heat method. All four ways to cook asparagus give delicious results, and the technique I choose depends on the size of the spears and the accompanying flavors I have in mind.



grilling



sautéing



boiling



roasting

grilling

I first encountered grilled asparagus years ago in a tapas bar in Spain. The sizzling spears, charred in spots, were served with aioli (garlic mayonnaise), and they were a revelation.

So that they're cooked evenly through, I first blanch the spears briefly, which can be done ahead. Then I pat them dry, roll them in olive oil, season with salt, and grill them close to the coals. When they're lightly charred on one side, I turn them to sear the other. This method works with spears of any size.



Grilled Asparagus with Fresh Tarragon Mayonnaise

Serves four as a side dish; yields about $\frac{2}{3}$ cup mayonnaise.

I eat these asparagus with my fingers, dragging the spears through the mayonnaise. The tarragon mayonnaise is delicious with boiled asparagus, too.

1 large egg yolk, at room temperature*
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for grilling

2 teaspoons minced shallot
2 teaspoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 teaspoon minced fresh tarragon
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons fresh lemon juice; more to taste

Kosher salt

1½ pounds asparagus, trimmed

Make the mayonnaise: Put the egg yolk in a small bowl. Add a few drops of lukewarm water and whisk well. Begin adding the olive oil in a very thin stream, whisking constantly. When the sauce thickens and forms a creamy emulsion, you can add the oil a little faster. Whisk in the shallot, parsley, tarragon, and lemon juice. Season with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt or more to taste. If needed, whisk in a few drops of water to loosen the mayonnaise until it's spoonable, not stiff.

Prepare the asparagus: Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the asparagus and blanch for 1 minute for small spears, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes for medium spears. Transfer the asparagus with tongs to a bowl of ice water. When cool, lift the spears out of the ice water and thoroughly pat dry.

Prepare a hot charcoal fire or gas grill. Put the spears on a rimmed baking sheet or platter. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon olive oil, season with a generous pinch of salt, and toss with your hands to coat the spears evenly.

Position the grill grate as close to the coals or heat source as possible. Heat the grate and then arrange the asparagus on the grate directly over the heat with all the tips pointing in the same direction. Be sure to arrange the asparagus perpendicular to the bars so the spears don't fall through. Grill, turning the spears once with tongs, until they're blistered and lightly charred in spots, about 3 minutes total. Transfer to a platter and serve immediately, passing the mayonnaise separately.

* Note: The egg yolk in this recipe is raw, so if you're cooking for small children, the elderly, or anyone with a compromised immune system, use a pasteurized egg product instead.



roasting

Roasting amps up the taste of asparagus because none of the flavor is lost to boiling water. This method works best with thin or medium asparagus and is the easiest preparation of all. After snapping the spears, I roll them in olive oil, sprinkle them with salt, and arrange them in a single layer on a baking sheet. Then I roast them in a hot oven until they're tender, lightly blistered, and sizzling.

Roasted Asparagus with Buttery Breadcrumbs

Serves four as a side dish.

For the crumbs, choose a baguette or country-style loaf made with only flour, water, yeast and salt. (Avoid bread with sugar, eggs or seasonings.) The two-step method for breadcrumbs results in a more consistent texture.

**2 ounces day-old bread, crust removed, or four ½-inch-thick baguette slices
1½ tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ teaspoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
Kosher salt
1½ pounds asparagus, trimmed
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1½ teaspoons fresh lemon juice**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 250°F. Put the bread in a food processor and pulse until coarse crumbs form. Spread the crumbs on a rimmed baking sheet; bake until they're dry and lightly crisped, about 20 minutes. Let cool and then grind again in the processor to get a scant ¼ cup of fine crumbs.

Melt the butter in a skillet over moderately low heat. Add the breadcrumbs and thyme. Cook slowly, stirring often, until the crumbs are a uniform deep golden brown, about 18 minutes. Season with ⅛ teaspoon salt and set aside to let cool. The crumbs will crisp as they cool.

Raise the oven temperature to 450°F. Put the asparagus on a baking sheet in a single layer and drizzle with the olive oil. Using your hands, toss the spears to coat evenly with the oil. Season with ½ teaspoon salt. Roast until the spears are tender and lightly blistered, 12 to 14 minutes for medium spears. Transfer them to a platter or individual plates, sprinkle with the lemon juice, and top with the breadcrumbs. Serve immediately.

To cut or to snap?

Opinions vary about how to prepare asparagus for cooking. Unless you buy spears that have already been trimmed to the top four or five inches, you'll need to remove the tough ends. Some people simply cut the spears where the green color fades, but I prefer to snap off the ends. I hold each spear, one at a time, in both hands and bend it until it breaks naturally at the point at which it becomes tough. I think this is a more reliable trimming method, and I don't mind that the snapped spears aren't all exactly the same length.

Many cooks peel asparagus, especially large spears, but I never do. If you've snapped it properly, the entire spear will be tender, so peeling doesn't enhance tenderness—it just removes flavor.

boiling

Asparagus cooked in rapidly boiling water has a clean, mild flavor that invites a rich sauce, like an herbed vinaigrette, a piquant Italian salsa verde, or a mayonnaise (like the tarragon mayonnaise on p. 48). Boiling is also good for thick, meaty spears, which take a long time to cook thoroughly with a dry-heat method.

Boil spears in a large pot of generously salted water and remove them as soon as they lose their crispness—taste one to be sure. Drain on clean dishtowels; dress and serve warm. To serve asparagus cool, shock the spears in ice water after boiling; pat dry, dress, and serve. I think serving them actually cold mutes their flavor.

I don't advocate steaming asparagus. A covered steamer traps gases that dull the spears' bright green color, while boiling in salted water preserves the color and lightly salts the spears at the same time.



Boiled Asparagus with Salsa Verde

Serves four as a side dish; yields $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sauce.

This zippy salsa verde is also delicious on poached chicken, salmon, halibut or steamed cauliflower. Be sure to grate the lemon zest before you juice the lemon. You can make the salsa verde up to 8 hours ahead.

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 tablespoon minced shallot
4 anchovy fillets, rinsed and minced to a paste
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons capers, rinsed and finely minced

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
Sea salt or kosher salt
1½ pounds asparagus, trimmed

Make the salsa verde: In a bowl, combine the olive oil, parsley, shallot, anchovies, lemon juice, capers, and lemon zest. Stir to blend and then season to taste with $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt, or more to taste.

Cook the asparagus: Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the asparagus and cook until just tender, about 4 minutes for medium spears. Lift the asparagus out of the boiling water with tongs and pat dry on a clean dishtowel. Transfer to a platter, arranging the spears with the tips pointing in the same direction. Spoon the sauce over the warm spears and serve immediately.

sautéing

Sautéed Asparagus with Butter & Parmesan

Serves four as a side dish.

You can embellish the basic method, adding peas or fava beans to make a spring vegetable mélange, or you can toss the sautéed asparagus with hot pasta. Or serve this as a side dish for roast chicken, lamb, or pork.

**1½ pounds asparagus, trimmed
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper
1 tablespoon minced fresh
flat-leaf parsley
¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano
Reggiano**

Slice the asparagus on a sharp diagonal about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, leaving the tips whole. Melt the butter in a large (12-inch) skillet over moderate heat. Add the asparagus and season with the salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until the asparagus is just tender, 5 to 6 minutes, lowering the heat if needed to keep the asparagus from browning. Don't overcook; the asparagus will soften a little more as it cools. Remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the parsley and 3 tablespoons of the cheese. Transfer to a serving bowl, top with the remaining cheese, and serve immediately.

Sautéing works well on medium to large asparagus. The spears should be thinly sliced on the diagonal to expose the most flesh. Although I sauté the slices in butter, you could use olive oil, adjusting the heat so they cook rapidly but without browning. Like roasting, sautéing preserves and intensifies flavor because the spears are never blanched.



Size has little impact on tenderness

Every asparagus crown—as the root system is called—produces both thick and thin spears over the course of its 10- to 15-year life. Healthy plants in the prime of life will produce relatively more thick spears; new and old plants tend to yield more thin ones. I like asparagus at every size, and I think that jumbo spears can be just as tender as skinny ones.

Janet Fletcher, a food writer, lives in the Napa Valley. ♦

cupcakes

BY GREG PATENT

While growing up in San Francisco, I haunted my neighborhood bakery, which sold all kinds of cupcakes: Chocolate, maple-frosted, banana-nut, and coconut cream were my favorites. The first thing I did with my weekly allowance was buy a cupcake, sometimes two. I loved peeling the paper away slowly, to be sure I didn't tear the tender cake. Then I'd bite a bit off the top to get a good gob of icing and nibble down to the base of the cupcake. This was my cupcake-eating ritual, and it never varied.

The recipes here were all inspired by the cupcakes I ate decades ago, although now I'm more interested in exciting flavor combinations and taste and texture harmonies. Butterscotch and caramel are so scrumptious that I decided to put them together in the Caramel Cupcakes with Butterscotch

Ginger, butterscotch, and mocha mean these treats aren't just for kids



Mocha Chip Cupcakes

Yields 12 cupcakes.

- 3 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped**
4½ ounces (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
2 teaspoons instant espresso powder, dissolved in ½ cup cool water
4 ounces (¾ cup) semisweet chocolate chips
1 recipe Chocolate-Sour Cream Frosting (at right)

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line 12 standard-size muffin cups with paper liners.

Put the unsweetened chocolate in the top of a double boiler or in a metal bowl set over a small saucepan of barely simmering water. Stir occasionally until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Set aside to cool slightly.

Sift the flour, baking soda, and salt into a small bowl. In a large bowl, beat the butter with a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or a hand mixer) on medium speed until the butter is smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. With the mixer running, slowly pour in

the sugar. Stop the mixer, scrape the bowl and beaters, and then beat on medium-high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, on medium speed, beating until the batter is smooth after each addition (about 30 seconds). Scrape the bowl after each addition. Add the vanilla and melted chocolate (which may be slightly warm) and beat until smooth and blended. On low speed, add the dry ingredients in three installments, alternating with the espresso in two additions, mixing after each addition only until the batter is smooth. Stir in the chocolate chips by hand.

Divide the batter evenly among the prepared muffin cups. (Use two rounded soupspoons: one to pick up the batter, one to push it off.) Don't smooth the batter. Bake until the cupcakes spring back when gently pressed in the center, 20 to 22 minutes. Let them cool in the tin for 5 minutes on a wire rack. Carefully remove the cupcakes from the tin, set them on the rack, and let cool completely.

Put a generous spoonful of the frosting on top of each cupcake and use the back of the spoon to spread and swirl it. Let the frosting set for about 30 minutes before serving. For garnishing ideas, see p. 56.

Chocolate-Sour Cream Frosting

Yields about 1¼ cups.

- 2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped**
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
½ cup sour cream (not low-fat)
¾ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Pinch salt
6 ounces confectioners' sugar (1½ cups, spooned and leveled)
Milk, if necessary

Put the chocolate and butter in the top of a double boiler or in a metal bowl set over a small saucepan of barely simmering water. Stir occasionally until the chocolate mixture is melted and smooth. Set aside to cool until barely warm.

In a medium bowl, whisk the sour cream, vanilla, and salt to blend. Gradually whisk in the confectioners' sugar until smooth. Add the chocolate mixture and beat it in with the whisk until the frosting is smooth and creamy. The frosting must be thick and spreadable. If it's too thick, thin it with droplets of milk. If it's too thin, chill it briefly, stirring occasionally, until adequately thickened.



Frosting. Ginger is available in so many forms—fresh, ground, and crystallized—that I wanted to try them together in one cupcake. The flavor of ginger is intense, so I decided on mini cupcakes that can be eaten in one or two bites, and I added a lemon–cream cheese frosting to help balance the ginger. And finally, the combination of coffee and chocolate inspired the Mocha Chip Cupcakes with Chocolate–Sour Cream Frosting.

Follow a few tips for tender cupcakes

When mixing cupcake batter, it's important to beat the butter and sugar thoroughly. This creates tiny air bubbles that will expand and help the batter rise. When adding dry ingredients, beat only enough to incorporate them; overbeating may toughen the cupcakes.

I line muffin tins with cupcake liners, which make it easier to remove the cupcakes from the pan and also give the cupcakes a portable casing. For sources, see p. 82.

To prevent overbaking, test the cupcakes for doneness at the minimum baking time. If you're not sure of your oven's temperature, check it with an oven thermometer.

Where did cupcakes come from?

In late 19th-century America, a revolutionary shift in home baking took place: Measuring ingredients by cups almost completely replaced measuring by weight. Cup measurement saved time; a housewife could simply dip her cup into the flour or sugar instead of weighing each ingredient on a balance scale. Originally, recipes called "cup cakes" weren't baked in cupcake pans but referred to the fact that the ingredients were measured in cups rather than on a scale.

At about the same time, muffin tins began to appear. Bakers soon realized that they could use the pans for more than just muffins, and the cupcake was created. At first, cupcakes were simply ordinary cake batters baked in muffin cups; the finished cupcakes were unadorned. But by 1902, Sarah Tyson Rorer, in *Mrs. Rorer's New Cook Book*, provided the recipe for a true cupcake—"Sponge Cups"—complete with icing, and the cupcake as an independent dessert entity was born.

Bite-Size Ginger Cupcakes

Yields 36 miniature cupcakes.

4 ounces (1 cup plus 3 tablespoons) sifted cake flour
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/8 teaspoon baking powder
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2/3 cup granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1-inch cube (3/4 ounce peeled piece) fresh ginger, finely grated (plus any juice)
4 teaspoons lightly packed, finely grated lemon zest
1 large egg, at room temperature
1/2 cup sour cream (not low-fat), at room temperature
1/4 cup (about 1 ounce) finely chopped crystallized ginger
1 recipe Lemon-Cream Cheese Frosting (at right)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line three miniature muffin pans (with 12 cups each) with miniature paper cupcake liners.

Sift the cake flour with the ground ginger, nutmeg, salt, baking soda, and baking powder. Whisk to ensure thorough mixing. Using a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or a hand mixer), beat the butter in a medium bowl on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add 3 tablespoons of the sugar, the

vanilla, grated ginger, and lemon zest; beat on medium speed for 1 minute. Add the remaining sugar, about 2 tablespoons at a time, beating for a few seconds after each addition. Scrape the bowl and beat for another 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl again. Add the egg and beat on medium high until very smooth, about 1 minute.

Add about one-third of the flour mixture and stir gently with a rubber spatula only until incorporated. Add half the sour cream and stir until incorporated. Repeat with half of the remaining flour mixture, the rest of the sour cream, and ending with the last of the flour mixture. Stir in the crystallized ginger.

Divide the batter evenly among the prepared muffin cups, filling each cup about three-quarters full. (Use two regular teaspoons: one to pick up the batter, one to push it off.) Don't smooth the batter.

Arrange the pans in the oven so that there's a bit of space between them and bake until the cupcakes are pale golden and spring back when gently pressed in the center, 17 to 20 minutes. Let the cupcakes cool in the tins on wire racks for 5 minutes and then invert the pans onto the racks to remove the cupcakes. Immediately turn the cupcakes right side up on the racks and let cool completely.

Spoon a heaping teaspoonful of the frosting onto the center of each cupcake and spread and swirl it with the back of the teaspoon. For garnishing ideas, see p. 56.

A tray of cupcakes with lemon-cream cheese frosting and lemon zest garnish.

Lemon-Cream Cheese Frosting

Yields 1 1/4 cups.

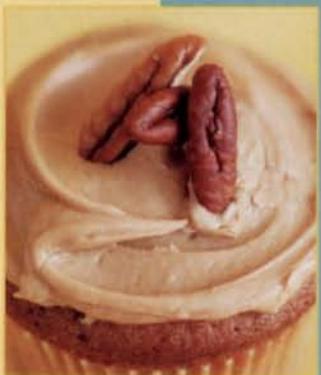
- 5 ounces cream cheese (not low-fat or whipped), at room temperature**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature**
- 2 tablespoons lightly packed, finely grated lemon zest**
- 4 teaspoons fresh lemon juice**
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- 5 ounces confectioners' sugar (1 1/4 cups, spooned and leveled)**

In a medium bowl, beat the cream cheese with a hand-held electric mixer on medium speed until very smooth, about 30 seconds. Add the butter and beat until smooth, about 30 seconds. Beat in the lemon zest, lemon juice, and vanilla. On low speed, gradually add the confectioners' sugar, beating until smooth. Increase the speed to high and beat for just a few seconds, until the frosting is smooth and fluffy. Don't overbeat or you may thin the frosting.

Dressing up a cupcake

You can vary the look of your cupcakes by topping them with decorative garnishes or by using colorful, festive liners (for sources, see p. 82). Finish the Mocha Chip Cupcakes with chocolate curls, shiny dragées, or a smattering of chocolate or colored sugar sprinkles. The Caramel-Butterscotch Cupcakes are very sweet on their own, but if you top them with toasted pecans, the nutty, toasty flavor balances the sweetness. You can use whole pecans, halves, or finely chopped pieces.

Garnish the Ginger-Lemon Cupcakes with chopped crystallized ginger (or a thin slice of crystallized ginger) for a hint of what's inside. Or try strips of lemon zest or candied flowers. Of course, these are just a few ideas—the possibilities are endless.



Making cupcakes ahead

If you want to make your cupcakes a day before serving, store them, unfrosted, in a covered plastic container. If you want to bake them farther ahead, freeze them unfrosted and uncovered, on a baking sheet. (Don't freeze frosted cupcakes—the texture of the frosting will suffer.) Once the cupcakes are frozen, transfer them to heavy-duty freezer bags and return them to the freezer, where they'll keep for about a week. To thaw, remove the cupcakes from the bags and set them on a flat surface. Frost them when they're completely thawed.

Caramel Cupcakes

Yields 12 cupcakes.

**1½ cup plus ¾ cup granulated sugar
6 ounces (1½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
4 ounces (½ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 recipe Butterscotch Frosting (at right)
1 cup finely chopped toasted pecans (optional)**

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line 12 standard-size muffin cups with paper liners.

Make the caramel: Bring ½ cup water to a boil in a small saucepan; keep very hot. Put the ½ cup sugar in a heavy-based 8-inch skillet or shallow saucepan. Set the pan over medium heat. Shake the pan to level the sugar and leave it alone until it's about half melted. Shake and swirl the pan to help the sugar melt completely. Cook the melted sugar, constantly swirling or stirring with a wooden spoon, until it bubbles and turns a deep reddish caramel color.

Immediately take the pan off the heat and carefully drizzle the boiling water over the caramel. The mixture will sputter. Return the pan to medium heat; stir constantly with the wooden spoon just until the caramel is completely dissolved. Pour the caramel into a heatproof liquid measuring cup. Pour about ½ cup water into the empty caramel pan and return to medium heat until very hot, stirring to dissolve any remaining caramel. Spoon enough of this liquid into the measuring cup with the caramel to bring the level up to ½ cup. Let cool until warm. (You can make the caramel hours or even a day ahead. When cool, cover and leave at room temperature.)

Make the cupcakes: Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt into a small bowl. In a large bowl, beat the butter with a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or a hand mixer) on medium speed until smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. With the mixer running, slowly pour in the remaining ¾ cup sugar, stop the mixer, and scrape the bowl and beaters. Beat on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, on medium speed until the batter is smooth, 30 to 60 seconds after each addition; scrape the bowl each time. Beat in the vanilla. On low speed, add the dry ingredients in three installments, alternating with the caramel. Mix only until the batter is smooth.

Divide the batter evenly among the prepared muffin cups. (Use two rounded soupspoons: one to pick up the batter, one to push it off.) Don't smooth the batter. Bake until the cupcakes are golden brown and spring back when gently pressed in the center, 18 to 20 minutes. Let the cupcakes cool in the tin for 5 minutes on a wire rack. Carefully remove the cupcakes from the tin, set them on the rack, and let cool completely.

Spoon a slightly heaping tablespoon of the frosting on top of each cupcake and use the back of the spoon to spread and swirl the frosting. If the frosting starts to stiffen, reheat it briefly over medium-low heat until it's spreadable.

Holding a cupcake by its liner, dip it into the chopped pecans, if using, and turn it gently all around to coat the frosting thoroughly with the pecans. Repeat with the remaining cupcakes. (Save any leftover pecans for another use.) Let the frosting set for about 30 minutes before serving. For garnishing ideas, see the box at top left.

You don't need a special tool to frost cupcakes—just spread and swirl using the back of a spoon.

Butterscotch Frosting

Yields about 1 cup.

1/4 cup unsalted butter
1/3 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
1/4 cup heavy cream; more as needed
6 ounces confectioners' sugar (1 1/2 cups, spooned and leveled)
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Melt the butter in a heavy 2- or 3-quart saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the brown sugar and stir almost constantly with a wooden spoon. After 2 to 3 minutes, the sugar will melt and smooth out, and the mixture will begin to bubble (it's all right if it still looks separated at this point). Once this happens, stir constantly for 2 minutes (less if the sugar smells like it's burning). Carefully add the 1/4 cup cream and stir constantly for another 2 minutes. The mixture will thicken slightly and look smooth and glossy. Remove the pan from the heat and let cool for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Beat in the confectioners' sugar and vanilla with the wooden spoon. If the frosting seems a little dry, beat in more cream, 1/2 tablespoon at a time, until it's thick, smooth, and spreadable.

Greg Patent is the author of *Baking in America*, which won the James Beard award for best baking book of 2003. ♦



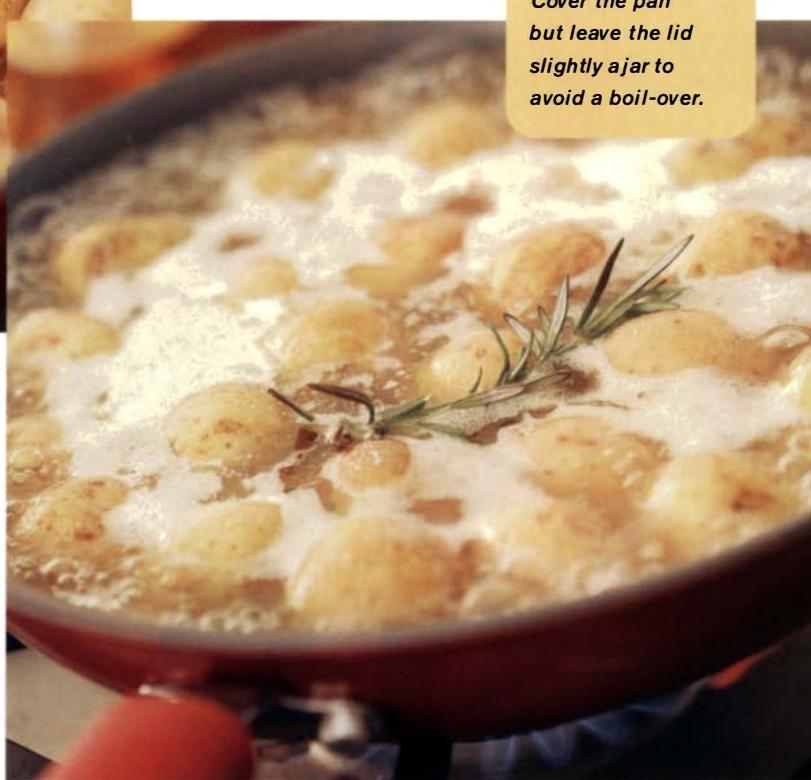


1 Put unpeeled baby potatoes in a nonstick skillet so they're almost but not quite touching—they'll need the wiggle room later when they're cracked.

2 Boil the potatoes in chicken broth to get them tender and to give them meaty flavor. Cover the pan but leave the lid slightly ajar to avoid a boil-over.

Try this easy method for creamy potatoes that taste like they cooked alongside a roast

BY JACQUES PÉPIN



Skillet “Roasted” Potatoes

If you love the way potatoes taste when they've cooked alongside a roast chicken or roast beef, then you'll love my recipe for potatoes fondantes. It produces the same creamy inside and sweet browned outside that you get from roasting potatoes in a pan with meat juices, but with a few advantages: You don't need to make a roast, there's virtually no preparation time, and the potatoes cook in only about half an hour.

Potatoes fondantes (which means “melting”) is an old French recipe. The idea is to boil potatoes in broth until tender and then press on them just so they crack open. This lets the potatoes absorb the broth, giving them a rich flavor and a creamy, almost “melting” texture. They continue to cook, uncovered, until the liquid is evaporated

3 Press firmly on the potatoes to crack them; this helps them absorb more broth and ensures a creamy, moist interior. After cracking, continue boiling, but now uncovered.

4 After the broth has completely reduced, let the potatoes sizzle in the skillet until their bottoms are deliciously browned. Turn to brown the other side and then serve while hot.



and the potatoes have browned. Traditionally, the potatoes for this classic dish are peeled and trimmed into ovals, but my updated version—made with unpeeled, whole baby potatoes—is far less time-consuming.

The key to getting the creamy interior is to keep the potatoes surrounded by liquid. If the liquid doesn't come at least halfway up the potatoes after you've cracked them, add a little broth or water.

Of course, this dish is great with roasted beef, chicken, or lamb, but for me, potatoes fondantes makes a meal with a garlicky escarole salad. I like to add a sprinkling of fleur de sel (French sea salt; for sources, see p. 82) at the table to give a crunchy, salty bite to the creamy potatoes.



Flaky salt crystals, tasting of the sea. Fleur de sel is gathered from the Brittany coastline.



Potatoes Fondantes

Serves four to six.

A nonstick skillet is crucial so the potatoes don't stick to the pan as the liquid evaporates.

2 pounds baby Yukon Gold or Red Bliss potatoes (20 to 25 potatoes, 1½ to 1¾ inches in diameter)
1 sprig fresh rosemary
2 cups homemade or low-salt chicken broth
2 tablespoons good-quality extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 teaspoon kosher salt (less if the broth is salty)
1 to 2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh chives
Fleur de sel or other sea salt for serving (optional)

Trim the potatoes of any eyes or damaged areas and wash well in cold water. Arrange as many potatoes as will fit in one layer in a 10-inch nonstick skillet (there should be a little room to spare; save any extra potatoes for another use). Add the rosemary, broth, oil, butter, and salt. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium, cover the pan but leave the lid a tad ajar, and boil until the potatoes are tender when pierced with a fork, about 20 minutes. The liquid should still halfway surround the potatoes; if it doesn't, add more broth or water until it does.



Remove the pan from the heat and press on each potato with a 1/4-cup measure just until it cracks open. Set the pan over medium-high heat and cook, uncovered, until all the liquid has evaporated and the potatoes have browned on one side, about 10 minutes. Gently turn the potatoes and brown the other side, another 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat and let the potatoes rest for 5 minutes before transferring them to a serving platter. Sprinkle with the chives and serve immediately, passing the fleur de sel so diners can sprinkle some on if they want.

Jacques Pépin, a legendary chef, teacher, and cookbook author, has been eating potatoes fondantes since his boyhood in Lyons, France. ♦

For a relaxed night off, two chefs take it easy in the kitchen and create a menu around a do-ahead chicken ragoût

A Savory Chicken Stew for Company

Menu

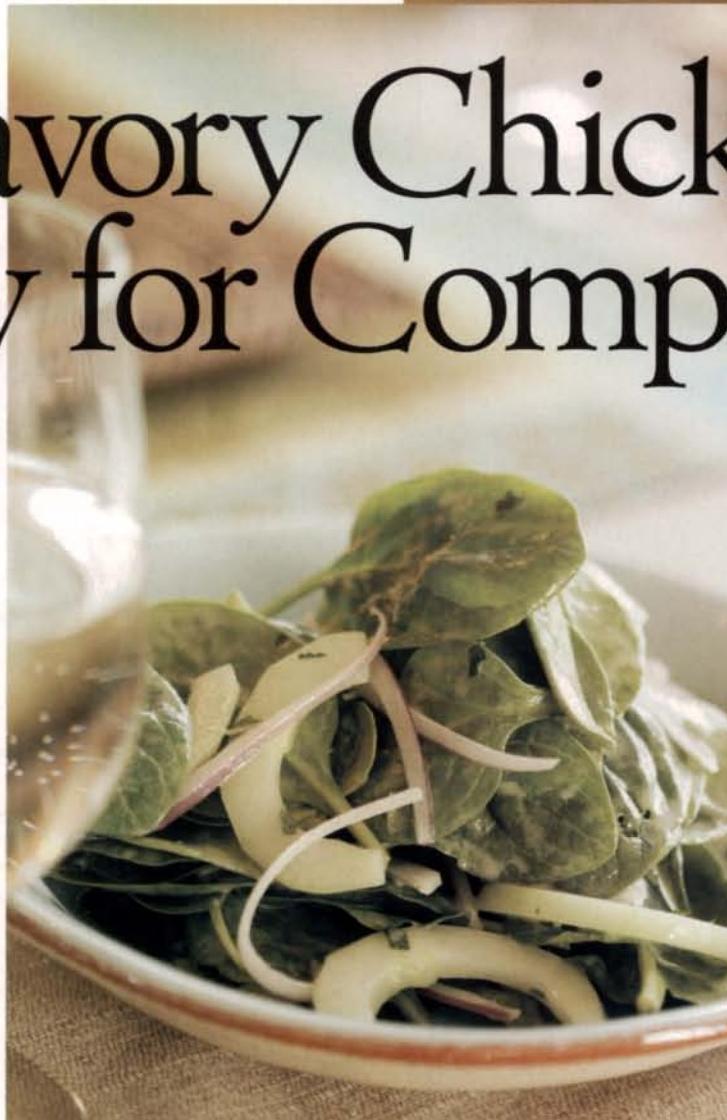
Goat Cheese Crackers with Hot Pepper Jelly

Chicken & Shrimp Ragoût with Curry Spices

Toasted Almond Rice

Spinach & Cucumber Salad with Yogurt-Mint Dressing

Bourbon Chocolate Cake





BY KAREN & BEN BARKER

We both cook for a living, but on nights off, we still gravitate to the kitchen—our home kitchen. So for us, having friends in is one of the best ways we know of to relax and still have a social life. But like most restaurant chef-owners, we lead hectic lives. So when we do invite people over, the menu needs to be special but not fussy—and it must be stress-free.

One of the great secrets to Southern hospitality—or any hospitality, for that matter—is a crowd-pleasing menu that lends itself to advance preparation, so that once your guests arrive, you can spend time with them, rather than in the kitchen. With a tiny bit of planning, this meal fits the bill perfectly. It comes together in a few advance stages, minimizing stress, and maximizing a good time. The timetable on p. 64 will guide you.

The dishes here are contemporary updates of Southern comfort food. We begin with a zippy little starter—goat cheese and red pepper jelly on



crackers. A take on a traditional canapé served at old-fashioned North Carolina parties, these are great little bites for guests as they walk in the door.

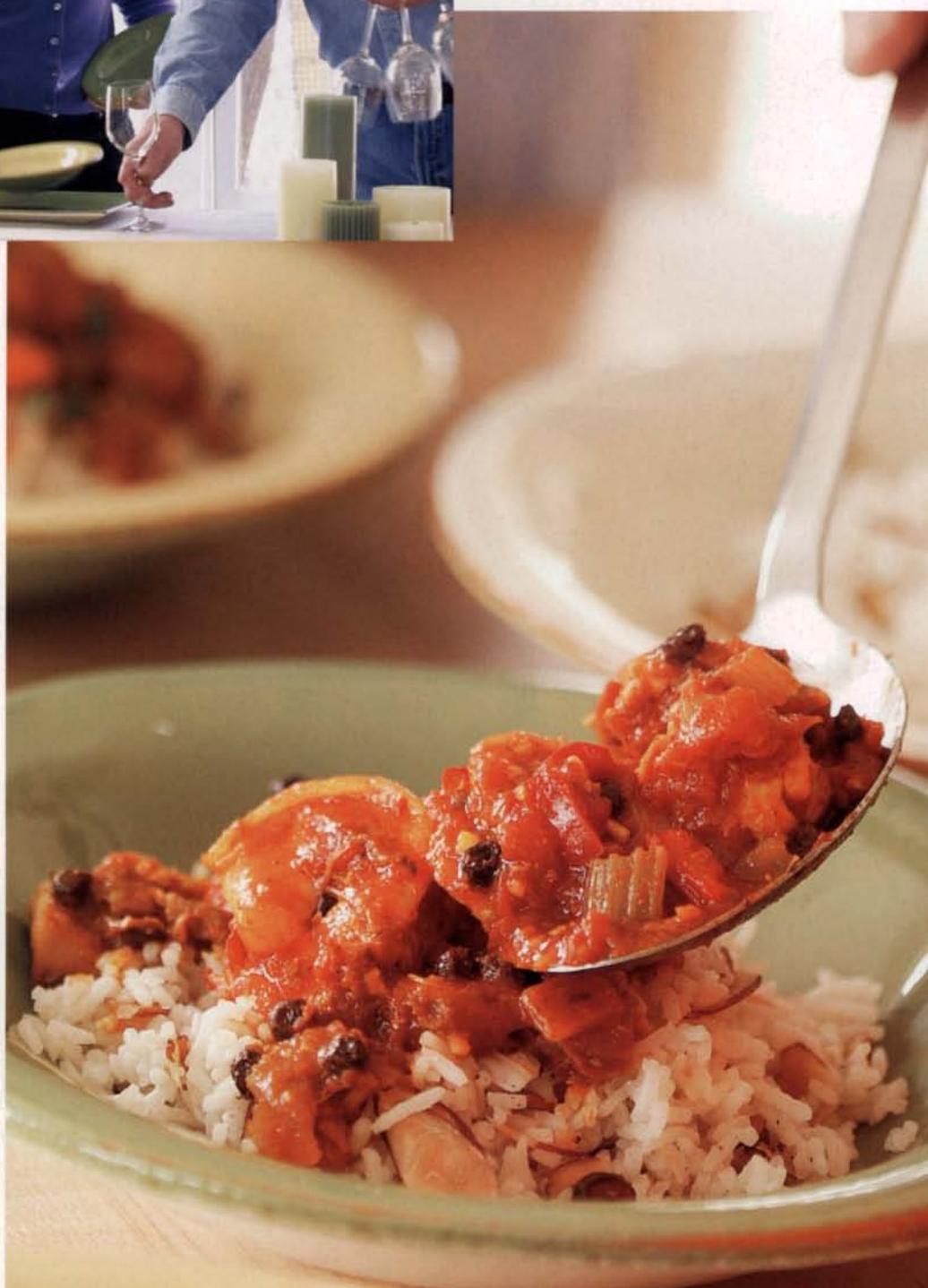
The main course, a fragrant chicken and shrimp stew, has its origins in seaboard cities of the South, where British trading companies imported Indian spices. We love everything about this dish: its aromas, the contrasting textures, and the fact that it reheats beautifully and tastes even better after a little resting time. We let the curry blend in the stew be our guide where accompaniments are concerned. Aromatic, fluffy basmati rice with toasted almonds will soak up the savory juices from the stew. A cooling salad of cucumbers and spinach with yogurt and mint is a lovely foil; it's a nod to the Indian spices in the stew. Finishing things off is a simple and fabulous chocolate cake spiked with bourbon. This beauty is incredibly light in texture, intense in flavor, and can be baked up to a day ahead.

reader review

We asked a *Fine Cooking* reader to give this menu a real-world test-spin before publication. Here's what she reported:

"This menu was a ringing success! The curry was lovely—not too strong—and worked beautifully with the chicken and shrimp. The bourbon chocolate cake was elegant and extremely easy to prepare. I have six kids, so I baked two cakes—both were gone in 36 hours."

—Margaret Loewith,
Arlington, Virginia



Goat Cheese Crackers with Hot Pepper Jelly

This is so simple that we hesitate to call it a recipe because it comes together so quickly.

Bring a 5-ounce log of fresh, mild goat cheese to room temperature. (If your goat cheese is especially crumbly, mash it in a bowl with a touch of heavy cream.) On 24 crackers (we use Bremner Wafers—the

ones in the green box—but any good cracker will do), spread about a teaspoon of goat cheese. Top each cracker with 1/4 teaspoon good-quality hot pepper jelly (for recommendations, see Where to Buy It, p. 82). Sprinkle with snipped chives and pass around. Yields 24 canapés; serves eight.

Chicken & Shrimp Ragoût with Curry Spices

Serves eight.

Although shrimp isn't a strictly traditional ingredient, it dresses up this casual stew, making it suitable for company.

3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1-inch chunks
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 ribs celery, cut into ½-inch dice (1 cup)
1 green bell pepper, cut into ½-inch dice (1 cup)
1 red bell pepper, cut into ½-inch dice (1 cup)
1 small onion, peeled and cut into ½-inch dice (1 cup)
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons homemade Curry Spice Blend (see the box at right) or store-bought hot (Madras) curry powder
1 teaspoon dried thyme
28-ounce can plum tomatoes, drained and coarsely chopped; with their juices
2 cups homemade or low-salt chicken broth
½ cup dried currants
25 to 30 jumbo shrimp (21-25 count; about 1¼ pounds), peeled and deveined
Toasted Almond Rice for serving (see the recipe on p. 64)
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Up to two days ahead: Heat 1 tablespoon each of the oil and butter over medium-high heat in a large (at least 6-quart) Dutch oven. Season the chicken liberally with salt and pepper. Add half of the chicken pieces and sear

until golden brown on two sides, about 6 minutes. For best browning, stir infrequently and only to flip the chicken. Repeat with the remaining chicken, reducing the heat if the bottom of the pan starts to burn. Set all the chicken aside.

Lower the heat under the Dutch oven to medium and add another 1 tablespoon each of oil and butter. When hot, add the celery, peppers, and onion. Sauté until the vegetables are softened and lightly browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for another 2 minutes. Push the vegetables to one side of the pan and add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Add the curry spice blend, thyme, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon black pepper to the oil. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Raise the heat, add the tomatoes and their juices, and bring to a boil. Cook, stirring, until the tomatoes begin to break apart and the juices thicken slightly, about 5 minutes. Stir in the chicken broth and currants; return the mixture to a boil. Adjust the heat to maintain a vigorous simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened, about 15 minutes.

Return the chicken and any accumulated juices to the pot; simmer for about 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. (If you're working ahead, the stew may now be cooled and refrigerated.)

Just before serving: Bring the stew to a simmer over very low heat. Add the shrimp and simmer, stirring, until they just turn opaque and are cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes. Divide the rice among eight shallow soup bowls and spoon the stew on top. Sprinkle each serving with the chopped parsley and serve.



Curry Spice Blend

Yields about 2 tablespoons.

1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
½ teaspoon caraway seeds
½ teaspoon black peppercorns
2 allspice berries
2 whole cloves
¼ teaspoon cardamom seeds
1 tablespoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon cayenne

Put the cumin, coriander, caraway, peppercorns, allspice, cloves, and cardamom in a spice mill or coffee grinder and grind to a fine powder. Transfer the ground spices to a small bowl, stir in the turmeric and cayenne. If making ahead, store tightly covered, away from heat and light.

entertaining countdown

Up to one week ahead

- ❖ Make the curry spice blend.

Up to two days ahead

- ❖ Prepare the ragoût, omitting the shrimp; refrigerate.

Up to one day ahead

- ❖ Toast the almonds for the rice.
- ❖ Make and chill the yogurt-mint salad dressing.
- ❖ Bake the chocolate cake.

That afternoon

- ❖ Measure the rice ingredients.
- ❖ Prepare the spinach and cucumbers for the salad.
- ❖ Peel and devein the shrimp.

An hour before serving

- ❖ Remove the ragoût from the refrigerator.
- ❖ Whip the cream for dessert; chill it in a strainer lined with cheesecloth set over a bowl.

40 minutes before serving

- ❖ Make the rice, omitting the almonds.
- ❖ Reheat the ragoût over very low heat.

As guests arrive

- ❖ Assemble the crackers and goat cheese.

10 minutes before serving

- ❖ Add the shrimp to the ragoût; heat until they're just cooked through.
- ❖ Toss the salad.
- ❖ Fluff the rice; add the toasted almonds.



Toasted Almond Rice

Yields 8 cups, serves eight.

- 3 ounces (1 cup) sliced almonds
- 1½ tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1½ tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 2 large shallots, minced (¾ cup)
- 2 cups basmati rice, rinsed and drained
- 2 cups homemade or low-salt chicken broth
- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 350°F. On a rimmed baking sheet, toast the almonds until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes, shaking the pan occasionally and checking for even browning. Set aside.

In a medium Dutch oven or large ovenproof saucepan with a lid, heat the butter and oil over medium heat. Add the shallots and cook, stirring, until softened, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the rice and stir until all the grains are well coated. Add the chicken broth, water, salt, and a few grinds of pepper and bring to a boil. Cover the pot, transfer to the oven, and bake until the rice is tender and the liquid is absorbed, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from the oven. Let the rice stand, covered, for 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork, stir in the toasted almonds, and serve.

Spinach & Cucumber Salad with Yogurt-Mint Dressing

Serves eight; yields ¾ cup dressing.

- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 3 tablespoons Greek-style yogurt (like Total; see p. 82 for sources) or whole-milk yogurt (see p. 80)
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh mint
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 8 cups lightly packed baby spinach leaves, washed and dried (8 ounces)
- 2 medium cucumbers, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and sliced ¼ inch thick (3 cups)
- ½ small red onion, halved lengthwise and sliced very thinly (⅓ cup)

In a medium bowl, whisk the lemon juice and honey. In another bowl, whisk the yogurt and olive oil. Add the yogurt mixture to the lemon juice in a thin stream, whisking constantly. Add the mint, ½ teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste. Chill, covered, for up to 24 hours.

In a large bowl, combine the spinach, cucumbers, and onion. Season lightly with salt and pepper and add just enough dressing to moisten the ingredients. Toss to coat, divide among eight plates, and serve, passing any extra dressing at the table, if you like.



WINE CHOICES

For the curry-tomato flavors in the ragoût, choose a rich, fragrant white wine with no oak

Karen and Ben's menu of updated Southern classics that appeal to a crowd calls for equally unfussy wines. The goat cheese and pepper jelly crackers need a crisp white with zingy acidity. Sauvignon Blanc is perfect: The 2002 Mason (\$17) from Napa Valley or the 2002 Giesen (\$14) from New Zealand are two of the best I've tasted recently. The fragrant chicken stew and its exotic spice elements want a rich, fruity white without oak. Go for a Chenin Blanc, a Viognier, or even a blend; I like the 2002 Pine Ridge Chenin Blanc-Viognier (\$14), or Evolution by Sokol-

Blosser (\$15), a delicious blend of nine varieties. Or try Gruner Veltliner, a grape that's widely planted in Austria and starting to be more available here; Karen and Ben especially like the way it handles aromatic spices and tomatoes. Either the 2002 Hiedler "Loess" or the Hirsch "Veltliner #1" (both about \$14) would be delicious. (Retail prices are approximate.)

Tim Gaier, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier.

Turn the page for more of the menu.



Balancing act

The mint, honey and yogurt in the dressing provide refreshing contrast to the curry. We like Greek-style yogurt for its creamier consistency and fuller flavor (look for Total brand) but a rich whole-milk yogurt will also work in this dressing (for recommended brands, see p. 80).



Make your shallow cake pan deeper

If your 9-inch cake pan is less than 3 inches deep, make a paper collar to support the cake as it rises. Cut two 6x16-inch strips of parchment. Fold the two strips lengthwise to get two 3x16-inch strips. Butter one side of each strip. Line the inside edge of the pan with the strips, nestling them into each other, with the folded edge on the top and the buttered side facing in.

Bourbon Chocolate Cake

Serves eight to ten.

This mousse-like cake really does melt in your mouth. It can be baked up to a day before serving and stored lightly wrapped at room temperature. If you don't have a 9x3-inch cake pan, use a 9x2-inch pan (a standard size sold in supermarkets) and construct a parchment collar so the cake has room to rise; see the box at left. For this cake, it's worth splurging on the best chocolate you can buy. We like Callebaut.

**11 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped
6 ounces (12 tablespoons) unsalted butter
6 large eggs, separated, at room temperature
¾ cup packed light brown sugar
1 ounce (¼ cup) all-purpose flour
¼ cup bourbon
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon kosher salt**

FOR SERVING:

**1 cup heavy cream
1 to 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
Confectioners' sugar for dusting**

Position an oven rack on the middle rung and heat the oven to 350°F.

Butter a 9x3-inch cake pan (or line a shallower one as directed at left). Line the bottom of the pan with a round of parchment and butter the parchment. Set the cake pan in a roasting pan large enough to accommodate it.

Melt the chocolate and butter over a double boiler. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

With an electric mixer (a stand mixer with the whip attachment or a hand mixer), beat the egg yolks with the brown sugar on medium speed until very pale, thick, and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Reduce the speed, add the chocolate mixture, and mix just to combine. Add the flour, mixing just to combine and scraping the bowl as needed. Blend in the bourbon and vanilla. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and set aside.

In a clean mixing bowl with clean beaters, beat the egg whites with the salt on high speed until they hold soft peaks, 1 to 2 minutes. With a rubber spatula, fold one-third of the egg whites into the chocolate mixture to lighten it, and then gently fold in the remaining whites. Scrape the batter into the prepared cake pan.

Set the roasting pan on the oven rack and add enough warm tap water to come halfway up the sides of the cake pan. Bake until the top feels set, 40 to 45 minutes. Remove the cake pan from the water bath and run a paring knife around the inside of the pan (or the inside of the parchment collar) to loosen the cake and then let the cake cool completely in the cake pan on a rack. When the cake is completely cool, loosen the sides once more with a paring knife. Cover the cake with a serving plate and invert the cake onto the plate. The bottom of the cake is now the top. Peel off the parchment. (Don't worry if the surface looks a little ragged; you'll be dusting with confectioners' sugar).

To serve: In a chilled bowl with chilled beaters, beat the cream and sugar to medium-soft peaks. Dust the top of the cake generously with confectioners' sugar, slice, and serve each slice with the whipped cream.

Karen and Ben Barker are the chef-owners of Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina. ♦

A Trio of Soft Tacos



Soft corn tortillas and fillings like seared spiced beef, grilled chicken, and fried fish make these tacos authentically Mexican

BY JIM PEYTON

You probably think of a taco as a crisp corn tortilla shell filled with ground beef, lettuce, tomato, and grated yellow cheese. You might even call this taco "Mexican," but in reality, hard-fried taco shells are rare in Mexico. More often, Mexican tacos are made with exquisite, fresh soft tortillas and filled with a huge variety of intriguing fillings. In fact, I've almost never had two tacos in a

row that were even similar, much less the same.

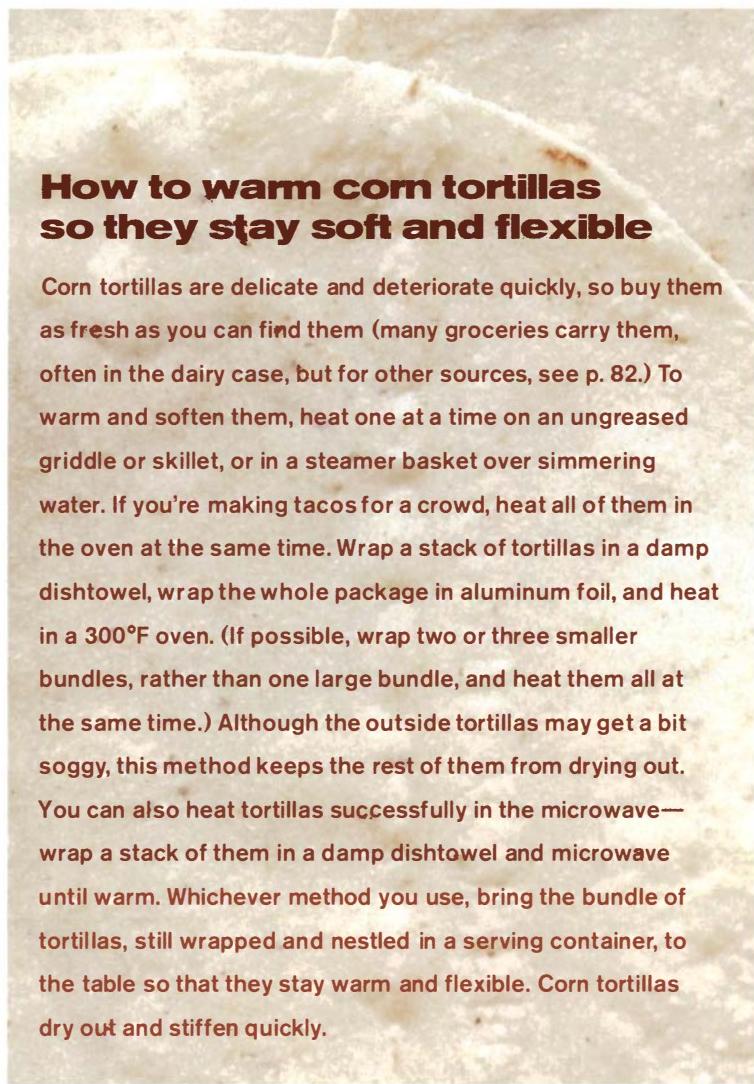
In Mexico, tacos can be made with flour or corn tortillas, and corn tortillas can be fried in oil or heated on a hot griddle. The fillings can include beef, pork, lamb, chicken, duck, turkey, and many kinds of vegetables. Fillings can be pan-broiled, char-broiled, steamed, stewed, broiled on vertical spits, or pit-cooked. With all these choices,

infinite taco variations are possible, and new tacos are invented every day. In upscale restaurants in Mexico, you might even find hot tortillas and salsa served with foie gras and duck confit.

The recipes I'm introducing to you here are just a few great taco ideas. The name of the chicken taco—*alambre*—comes from the Spanish word for wire, meaning a shish kebab skewer; this taco is stuffed with chopped grilled or seared chicken. The chile-rubbed steak taco recipe is adapted from one I found in Zacatecas, Mexico, and features an unusual spice rub made with cinnamon, allspice, and cloves. The fish taco, one of Mexico's most creative tacos, was

made first by street vendors in the Baja California port of Ensenada. It's filled with crisp, beer-battered fresh fish and garnished with shredded cabbage and a spicy tartar sauce.

Finally, I've included three easy, flavorful condiments—a pico de gallo, guacamole, and a fresh tomatillo salsa. For all three tacos, I like soft corn tortillas, which have a more interesting texture and distinctive flavor than their flour counterparts. Serve heated tortillas at the table alongside the fillings. I usually serve fish tacos with the spicy tartar sauce and pico de gallo; with the other tacos, feel free to mix and match condiments as you like.



How to warm corn tortillas so they stay soft and flexible

Corn tortillas are delicate and deteriorate quickly, so buy them as fresh as you can find them (many groceries carry them, often in the dairy case, but for other sources, see p. 82.) To warm and soften them, heat one at a time on an ungreased griddle or skillet, or in a steamer basket over simmering water. If you're making tacos for a crowd, heat all of them in the oven at the same time. Wrap a stack of tortillas in a damp dishtowel, wrap the whole package in aluminum foil, and heat in a 300°F oven. (If possible, wrap two or three smaller bundles, rather than one large bundle, and heat them all at the same time.) Although the outside tortillas may get a bit soggy, this method keeps the rest of them from drying out. You can also heat tortillas successfully in the microwave—wrap a stack of them in a damp dishtowel and microwave until warm. Whichever method you use, bring the bundle of tortillas, still wrapped and nestled in a serving container, to the table so that they stay warm and flexible. Corn tortillas dry out and stiffen quickly.

Pico de Gallo

Yields about 1½ cups.

This salsa is best served within an hour.

**¼ cup coarsely chopped white onion
¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
3 fresh serrano or jalapeño chiles, cored, seeded, and coarsely chopped
1½ ripe medium tomatoes, finely chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**



Tomatillo Salsa

Yields about 1 cup.

This salsa is best served within an hour.

**½ pound tomatillos, husks removed
1 large or 1½ small serrano chiles, cored, seeded, and coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped white onion
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
¾ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon finely chopped garlic**



Cut the tomatillos into quarters. Put them in a blender, along with the chiles, onion, cilantro, salt, and garlic. Pulse, scraping the sides of the blender with a rubber spatula after a few seconds, until the ingredients are very finely chopped and combined (the salsa should be somewhat smooth, but still have some texture), 30 to 60 seconds. Serve with the taco recipe of your choice.



a filling of finely chopped chicken, chiles, and cheese

Grilled Chicken Tacos Alambres

Yields 12 to 16 tacos; serves four to six.

FOR THE MARINATED CHICKEN:

½ cup fresh lime juice (from about 2 limes)
1 tablespoon ancho chile powder
2 cloves garlic, minced (about 2 teaspoons)
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 cup vegetable oil
1¼ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts

FOR THE FILLING:

1 tablespoon vegetable oil; more if sautéing the chicken
3 slices bacon, finely chopped
1 cup cored, seeded, and finely chopped fresh poblano chiles (about 2 poblanos) or 2 fresh jalapeños and ½ green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
1 cup finely chopped yellow or white onion
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
Juice of 1 lime

Kosher salt

½ cup grated Oaxaca cheese or freshly grated mozzarella (optional)

FOR SERVING:

12 to 16 corn tortillas (5 to 6 inches wide), warmed (see the box at far left)
Guacamole (see the recipe on p. 70)
Pico de Gallo (see the recipe at left)
Tomatillo Salsa (see the recipe at left)

Marinate the chicken: In a medium bowl, mix the lime juice, chile powder, garlic, salt, oregano, and pepper; whisk in the oil. Add the chicken, cover, and marinate in the refrigerator for 1 hour but no longer than 1½ hours.

Make the filling: Prepare a medium-hot fire on a gas or charcoal grill or set a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat for 1½ minutes. Remove the chicken from the marinade, shaking off any excess. Grill the

chicken (or sear it in the skillet with 1 tablespoon oil), flipping after 4 minutes, until it's just firm to the touch and cooked through, about 9 minutes. Let the chicken cool and then chop it into very small pieces.

Heat a skillet over medium heat, add 1 tablespoon oil and the bacon, and cook, stirring frequently, until the bacon just begins to brown, about 6 minutes. Turn the heat to medium high, add the chiles and onion, and cook, stirring frequently, until they begin to soften, about 4 minutes. Add the chopped chicken, cilantro, and lime juice and stir constantly until the chicken is hot. Season with salt to taste. Sprinkle the cheese (if using) over the top, take the pan off the heat, and let the cheese melt.

To serve: Set the skillet with the filling on a trivet on the table next to the hot tortillas, guacamole, pico de gallo, and tomatillo salsa so each person can assemble his or her own tacos.

Tip: Oaxaca cheese, a soft cow's milk variety, is most widely available in supermarkets in the Southwest, but it's becoming more available in markets across the country. If you can't find Oaxaca, mozzarella makes the best substitute.

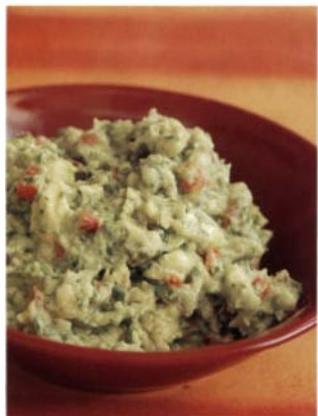
Guacamole

Yields 1½ cups.

Guacamole is best made as close to serving time as possible.

- 2 ripe avocados (about 6 ounces each)
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tablespoons minced red onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped Roma tomato
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice; more to taste
- Kosher salt

Halve and pit the avocados; scoop out their flesh into a large bowl. With a fork, mash the flesh into a coarse paste. Stir in the cilantro, onion, tomato, and lime juice. Season with ½ teaspoon salt. Add more lime juice or salt to taste and serve with the taco recipe of your choice.



Chile-Rubbed Steak Tacos

Yields 12 to 16 tacos; serves four to six.

FOR THE SPICE RUB:

- 2 tablespoons ancho chile powder (replace 1 tablespoon with pasilla chile powder if you like; see sources on p. 82)
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon ground allspice
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cloves

FOR THE FILLING:

- Juice of 1 or 2 limes
- 1½ pounds boneless rib-eye steaks, ½ inch thick
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

FOR SERVING:

- Kosher salt
- 12 to 16 corn tortillas (5 to 6 inches wide), warmed (see the box on p. 68)



Guacamole (see the recipe at left)

Pico de Gallo (see the recipe on p. 68)

Tomatillo Salsa (see the recipe on p. 68)

Make the spice rub: In a small bowl, combine all the spice rub ingredients.

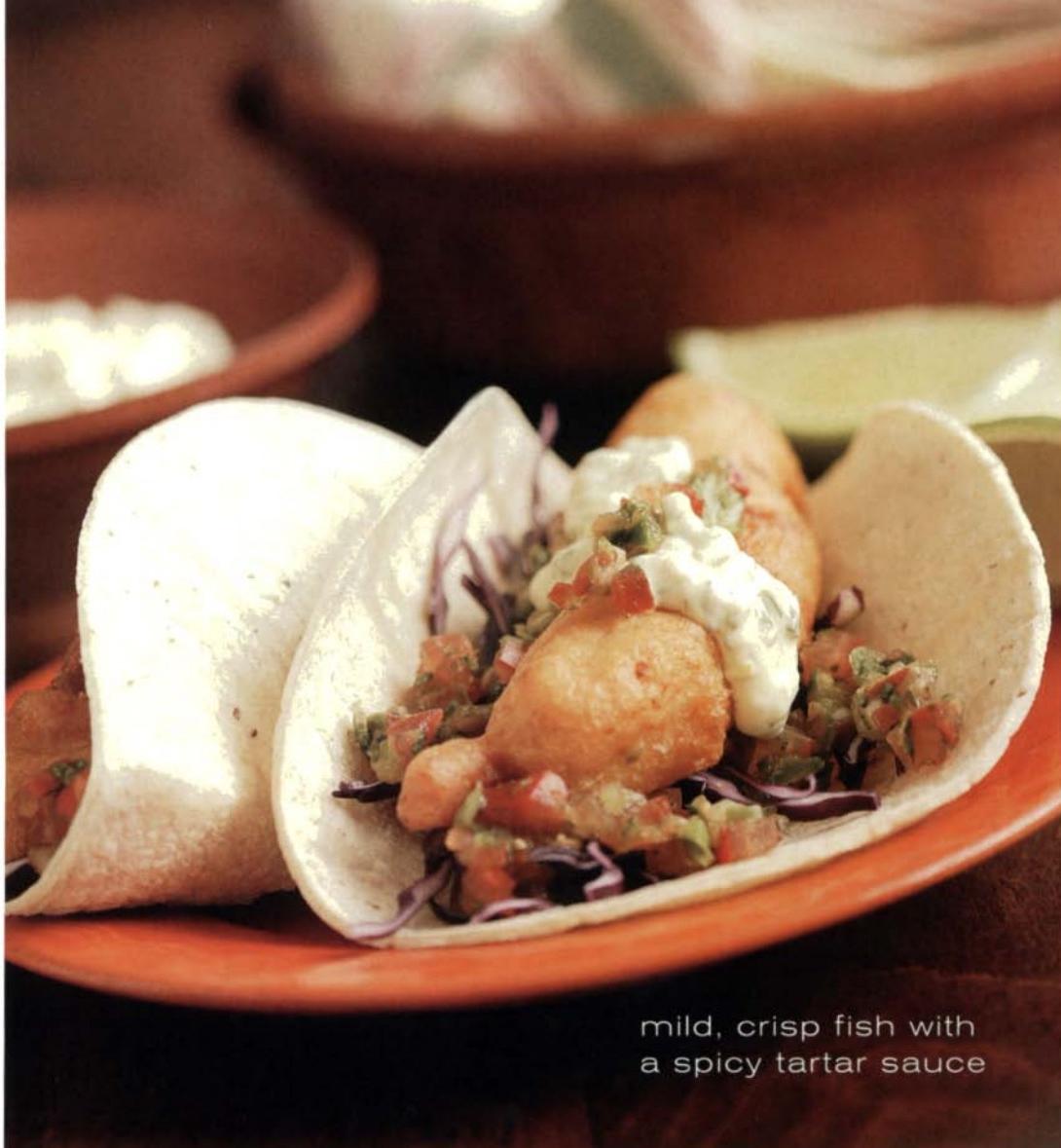
Make the filling: Brush the lime juice on both sides of each piece of meat and rub both sides with the spice rub. (You may not need all of the spice rub.)

Put the oil in a large, heavy skillet, preferably cast iron, and set it over medium-high heat until very hot. Cook the meat until it's well browned and just cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes per side for medium rare. Transfer to a cutting board and let rest for 3 to 5 minutes. Holding

a knife at a 45-degree angle, thinly slice the meat crosswise.

To serve: Put the sliced steak in a heated dish, sprinkle with salt, and set on the table. Next to it set the hot tortillas, guacamole, pico de gallo, and tomatillo salsa so each person can assemble his or her own tacos.

Tip: The spice rub for these tacos would also be delicious on top sirloin, New York strip steaks, shrimp, or pork—all of which would make great taco fillings, too.



mild, crisp fish with
a spicy tartar sauce

Beer-Battered Fish Tacos

Yields 12 to 16 tacos; serves four to six.

FOR THE SPICY TARTAR SAUCE:

1 cup mayonnaise
1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro
3 tablespoons minced pickled jalapeño
2 tablespoons dill pickle relish
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon yellow American mustard
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE FISH:

About 2 quarts vegetable oil for frying
1 cup all-purpose flour
Kosher salt
1 cup beer
2 egg whites, beaten to soft peaks
1 pound firm fillets of mild, white fish (such as bass, cod, or haddock), cut into strips about 4 1/2 inches long and 3/4 inch wide, or 1 pound frozen batter-fried fish fillets

FOR SERVING:

12 to 16 corn tortillas (5 to 6 inches wide), warmed (see the box on p. 68)
1 1/2 cups finely shredded green or purple cabbage (about 1/2 small head)
2 limes, quartered
Pico de Gallo (see the recipe on p. 68)

Make the sauce: Mix all the sauce ingredients in a medium bowl; refrigerate for up to 5 days.

If using fresh fish: Fill a large, deep, heavy pot with vegetable oil to about 1 1/4 inches deep. Heat the oil to about 350°F. (To check the oil temperature, use a deep-fry thermometer, or add a cube of bread to the oil, which should bubble immediately.)

Meanwhile, prepare the batter: Mix the flour and 1 teaspoon salt in a medium bowl and stir in

the beer until smooth. Gently fold in the beaten egg whites.

Season the fish with salt. To cook the fish, work in batches of about three or four pieces at a time. Using kitchen tongs, dip each piece in the batter, let any excess drain off, carefully submerge the fish in the hot oil, and fry until golden brown and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a baking sheet lined with paper towels.

If using frozen batter-fried fish fillets: Bake them according to the package instructions.

To serve: Just after the fish comes out of the fryer (or oven), arrange in a heated dish on the table. Next to it set the tartar sauce, hot tortillas, shredded cabbage, lime quarters, and pico de gallo so each person can assemble his or her own tacos.

Pick a pure chile powder

I use pure chile powders (like New Mexico, pasilla, or ancho) instead of commercial blended ones, which can vary in quality, heat, and flavor. Commercial powders often include cumin, garlic powder, onion powder, and salt, as well as chiles that were ground with the seeds intact, which can make the powder bitter.

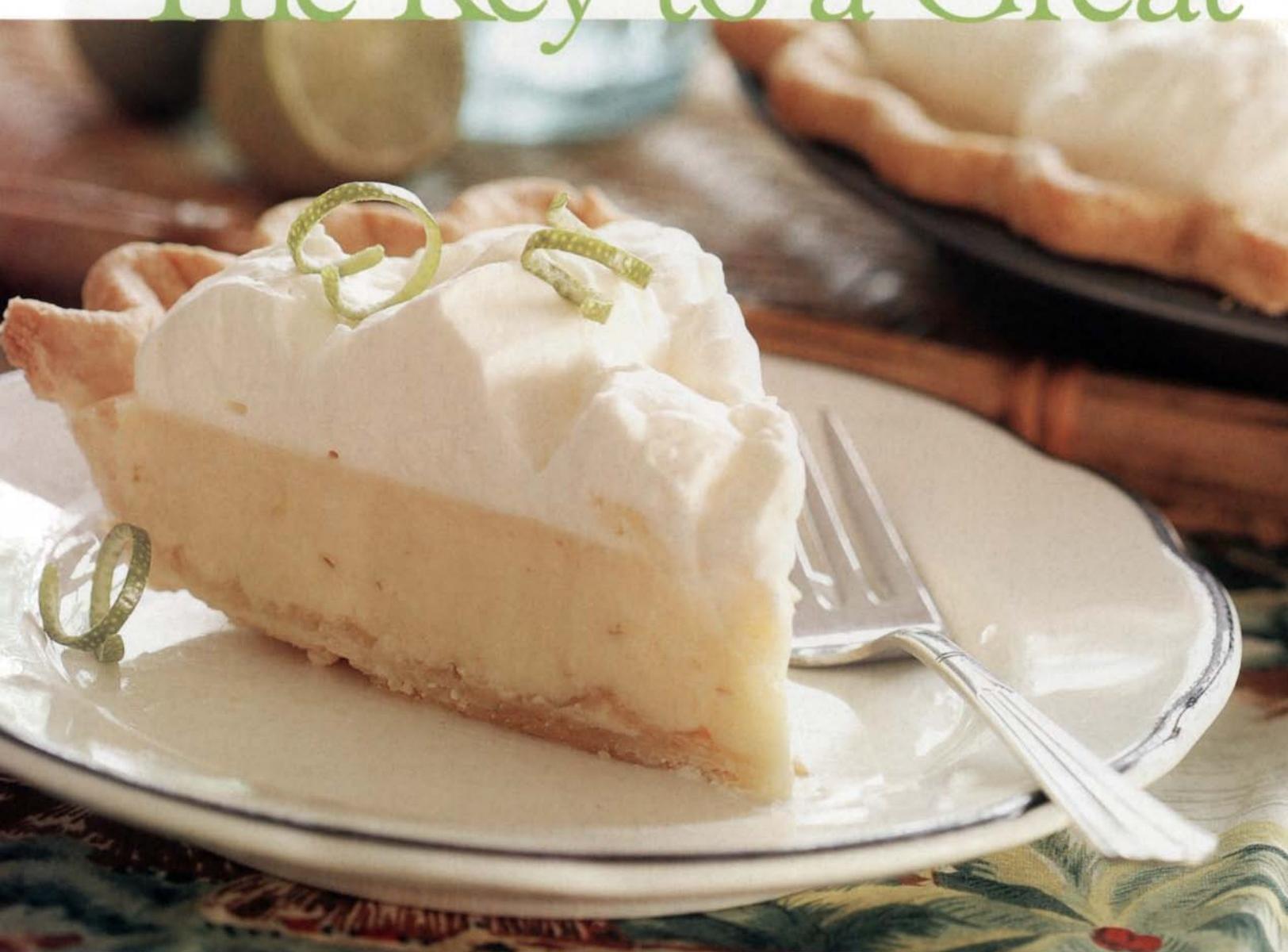
For my chile-rubbed steak taco recipe, I like ancho chile powder; its subtle fruity-spicy flavor pairs well with the spices in the rub. If you can't find it, try New Mexico chile powder—it has a drier, less fruity flavor and is slightly hotter. Or replace a tablespoon of the ancho powder with pasilla chile powder, which imparts hints of tobacco and chocolate.

For sources, see p. 82.

Tip: You don't have to fry your own fish—these tacos are also delicious made with high-quality frozen fish tenders sold by national brands. Gorton's Tenders in Original Batter is a good choice.

Jim Peyton is the author of three Mexican cookbooks. He lives in San Antonio, Texas, where he teaches Mexican cooking. ♦

The Key to a Great



To make the best version of this creamy-tangy pie, you don't need Key limes—just juicy ones

BY BECKY CAMPBELL

I've heard many people complain that the problem with making a good Key lime pie is finding Key limes, especially ones in good condition. But whenever I suggest using regular limes to make this delicious pie, I hear, "Oh, it wouldn't taste very good—not like a real Key lime pie!"

But you don't have to use Key limes. I've made scores of Key lime pies over the years. And it turns out that regular limes (also known as Tahiti or Persian limes) make just as good a pie. Maybe this will convince you.

My husband, Carl, a horticulture professor who specializes in tropical fruit, has found the acid and sugar components to be quite similar in both Key and Tahiti limes.

But Carl and I encountered so many skeptics—all of whom claimed they'd be able to tell the difference in a pie—that we decided to devise a dinner-party test where, for graduate students and colleagues, I made pies with both Key limes and Tahiti limes. We had guests try a piece of each and select which they liked best. In the more than twenty times that we did this, the votes were always tied.

My pie uses a true pie crust rather than a graham cracker crust. It's my mother's recipe, and it's what I've always used. I think a traditional pie crust is much better at showing off the lime flavor, which is what this great pie is all about.

Lime Pie



"Key" Lime Pie

Yields one 9-inch pie; serves eight to ten.

FOR THE CRUST:

**6½ ounces (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon table salt
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) chilled unsalted butter, cubed
2 tablespoons chilled vegetable shortening, cubed
2½ to 3 tablespoons ice water**

FOR THE FILLING:

**2 14-ounce cans sweetened condensed milk
2 large egg yolks
1 cup fresh lime juice (from about 4 limes)
2 teaspoons finely grated lime zest (from about 2 limes)**

FOR THE GARNISH:

**1 cup heavy cream
2 teaspoons granulated sugar
1 lime, zested into thin strips**

Make the crust: Put the flour and salt in a food processor; pulse to combine. Add the butter cubes and pulse until they're the size of extra-large peas (about 10 quick pulses). Add the shortening and continue pulsing until the largest pieces of butter and shortening are the size of peas (10 to 15 more quick pulses). Sprinkle 2½ tablespoons of the water over the flour mixture and pulse a few times until the mixture just begins to come together. It should look rather crumbly, but if you press some between your fingers, it should hold together. (If it doesn't, sprinkle on another ½ tablespoon water and pulse a few more times.) Dump the crumbly mix onto a lightly floured surface and press the dough into a 1-inch-thick disk. Wrap in plastic and chill for 30 minutes.

On a lightly floured work surface, roll the dough into a round that's ½ inch thick and 12 to 13 inches in diameter. Drape the dough around the rolling pin and ease it into a 9-inch pie pan. With kitchen shears, trim the overhang to ½ inch. Fold the overhang under and crimp it to build up an edge. Prick the crust with a fork in several places. Cover with plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, position an oven rack on the middle rung and heat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the crust: Grease one side of a sheet of foil with cooking spray, oil, or butter. Line the pie pan with the foil, greased side down, and fill it with pie weights or beans. Bake until the edges of the crust look dry and start to turn golden, 25 to 30 minutes. Carefully remove the foil and weights; continue baking until the entire crust is deeply golden brown, another 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool on a rack.

Make the filling: In a medium bowl, whisk the condensed milk, egg yolks, lime juice, and grated zest. Pour into the cooled pie crust and bake at 350°F until just set, about 30 minutes. The center may still be a bit jiggly. (Use an instant-read thermometer to double-check the doneness; the center of the pie should be at least 140°F.) Let the pie cool thoroughly on a rack and then cover with plastic and refrigerate to chill completely, at least 3 hours but no longer than a day.

Just before serving, whip the cream and sugar until stiff peaks form. Spread the cream on top of the pie, garnish with the strips of lime zest strips, and serve.

Lime choices

The limes we see most often in the grocery store are known as Tahiti or Persian limes. Choose limes that are about 2 inches in diameter, fragrant, and plump, with smooth, medium-green skin (below, at right). Stay away those that are rough-skinned, dark-green, and hard. If you can find good Key limes (like the ones below at left and center), about 1½ inches in diameter, with smooth greenish-yellow or yellow skin and a lovely lime aroma, go ahead and buy them—it will be a treat. But whatever you do, avoid bottled Key lime juice: The processing changes the flavor significantly.



Becky Campbell, a home economist, lives in Homestead, Florida. ♦

BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

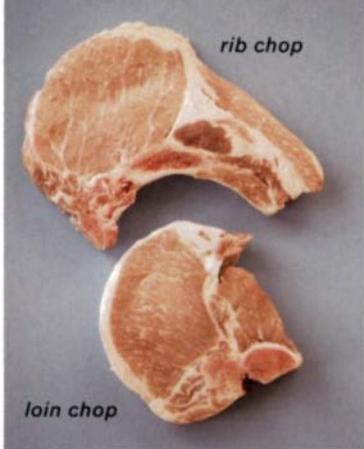
Our mission in the test kitchen is to give you all the information you need to get recipe results just like ours...

But there will always be variables that cause your recipes to come out slightly differently from ours. For instance, your stove is probably different. We cook on gas and maybe you cook on electric, or maybe your gas burners are stronger than ours. Your cookware likely differs, too. Perhaps your skillet conducts heat differently than the one we used, or maybe you don't have the same size pan. That's why, at every step,

we always describe exactly what should happen in addition to telling you about how long it should take. So if while making one of our recipes, things aren't happening exactly in our time frame and you think you should make an adjustment—like reducing the heat because your pork chops are browning too fast—go for it. Your good judgment is always the most important ingredient in any recipe.

Chop Talk

What to look for in a pork chop



While shopping for center-cut pork chops to test the recipes on p. 42, we learned that not all center-cut chops are clearly labeled as such. Fortunately, most chops sold in supermarkets are center-cut, and it's usually easy to pick them out because they look distinctive.

Two types of center-cut chops are readily available in groceries: The rib chop—with the bone arching along the outer edge of the chop—and the loin chop, which has an interior T-shaped bone (see the photos at left). Both types will make great sautéed chops,

but if you can, buy the rib chops: They tend to be more marbled with fat, which adds flavor and makes the chop less likely to dry out during cooking, says Chris Schlesinger, who wrote the article on p. 42. That said, your first priority should be finding chops of the right thickness. As we found in our tests, the best insurance for juicy chops (rib or loin) is buying chops that are good and thick—about 1 1/4 inches was our favorite thickness.

—Maryellen Driscoll, editor at large



tip: To quickly and cleanly stem a spinach leaf, fold the leaf in half and pull off the stem.



Choose inexpensive but drinkable wines for cooking

Here's a common dilemma: Say you want to make a recipe that calls for dry red wine to deglaze your pan to make a sauce, or maybe you need a dry white wine to make risotto. How do you decide which wine to buy? When it comes to shopping for the ingredients, nothing presents as many choices at the market as does wine, and the biggest mistake you can make is to pick something simply because it's cheap. Heat tends to exacerbate unpleasant qualities in wine, so remember this maxim: If you wouldn't drink it, you shouldn't cook with it. Therefore, avoid "cooking wines" like the plague.

Heat also blasts away wine's subtle nuances, so it's not a good idea to cook with a fine, expensive wine, either. What you want is something good but inexpensive; see the suggestions below. If you're not sure what to buy, ask for help. Describe what you want the wine for, and a good merchant should be able to help you find what you need.

Tips from the expert

White wines used for cooking should have zippy acidity and shouldn't be heavily oaky or sweet. Try California Sauvignon Blancs from makers like Geyser Peak or Delicato. Red wines should be soft, not overly oaky or tannic. Australian Shiraz blends from Rosemount and Lindemans fit this description and are good values. When it comes to fortified wines like vermouth, sherry, and Marsala, quality is even more critical. Look for imported brands in the \$8 to \$10 range.

—Tim Gaiser, contributing wine editor



at the market



Try tangy Tomatillos for Mexican sauces

The brilliant color and tangy flavor of the salsa on p. 68 come from its main ingredient, tomatillos. Also known as Mexican green tomatoes, husk tomatoes, and jamberry, among other aliases, tomatillos (pronounced tah-mah-TEE-ohs) are more closely related to the Cape gooseberry and the ground cherry than they are to regular tomatoes, although all are members of the nightshade family. Tomatillos look like firm little green tomatoes inside papery husks. When used raw, as they are in our salsa, their flavor is quite tart and citrusy, with an herbal quality. For other uses, like sauces and stews, tomatillos are more often cooked to tame their sharpness.

You can now find tomatillos in many supermarkets and commonly in Latin groceries. Look for tomatillos that are the size of walnut shells and that fill out their husks. The fruit should be very firm, and the husk should be closely wrapped around the fruit. Before using, peel off the husk and rinse the sticky coating off the fruit. Tomatillos will keep for three to four weeks stored loose or in a paper bag in your refrigerator's vegetable bin.

How to make a savory soufflé

Nothing brings drama to the dinner table like soufflés. These light and puffy creations never fail to impress, and yet they're actually not difficult to make—once you understand how they work.

Start with a white-sauce base. Nearly all savory soufflés begin with a thick white sauce made of milk, butter, and flour. Whatever flavoring is added to the sauce gives the soufflé its main identity, such as cheese or puréed spinach or other vegetable. Egg yolks are also added to enrich the soufflé.

Raise the volume with egg whites. The loft of a soufflé comes from air whipped into egg whites. In the heat of the oven, the air expands and the soufflé puffs dramatically. As the soufflé cools, it falls again but not completely; the soufflé stays light and airy.



The keys to a stunning soufflé

The way you handle the egg whites will make or break your soufflé. First you'll need to whip them so they're nearly stiff. A firm peak with a little curl at the tip means the egg whites are just right (as in the photo at right). If you don't whip them enough, they won't have as much air in them, and the soufflé won't rise as much as it could. But you don't want to overwhip them, either, or they'll be too stiff to fold easily into the base. If they're really overwhipped, they'll begin to break down before you can start to fold them in.

Folding in the egg whites is another potential pitfall. You want to keep as much air in the whites as possible, but you



Whip the egg whites to firm peaks

have to sacrifice some air in order to combine the whites with the base. It's a trade-off.

To fold, work swiftly but gently. With a rubber spatula held near the edge of the bowl farthest from you, cut down to the bottom of the bowl and drag



To fold, work swiftly but gently.

the spatula toward you. When you reach the near edge of the bowl, pull the spatula up and over in a gentle flipping motion to bring some of what's at the bottom of the bowl to the top (see the photo above). Give the bowl a little turn and continue

the circular motion of cutting down, dragging, flipping, and turning the bowl until you no longer see large areas of white.

Ideally, the whites will be completely folded in, but it's fine to leave a few patches of white if you're losing too much volume. A few spots of unincorporated whites in the soufflé are better than a soufflé that doesn't rise well.

Finally, don't peek too soon. If you open the oven door and let the heat out before the egg protein has set, the soufflé may fall. Let it bake for at least 20 minutes before opening the door. Until then, if you're dying to look, turn on the oven light and peer through the window.

Three-Cheese Soufflé

Serves four to six.

You can change the flavor of this soufflé by replacing the Gruyère and Asiago with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of a puréed cooked vegetable such as carrot, spinach, or broccoli. Depending on the vegetable, you may also want to adjust or eliminate the Parmigiano, mustard, Worcestershire, and Tabasco. The soufflé will begin to fall soon after it comes out of the oven, so don't delay in serving it.

3 tablespoons fine fresh white breadcrumbs
 $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce (1/4 cup) freshly finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano
3 tablespoons unsalted butter; plus 1 tablespoon softened for the baking dish
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup hot whole milk
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Tabasco sauce
Kosher salt
1½ ounces (½ cup) grated Gruyère
 $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce (¼ cup) finely grated Asiago
5 large eggs
Pinch cream of tartar

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Butter the inside of a straight-sided round baking dish that's about 2½ inches deep and holds 6 to 7 cups. Combine the breadcrumbs with 1 tablespoon of the Parmigiano. Coat the inside of the dish with this mixture, tapping out any excess.

Make the base: Melt the 3 tablespoons butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook until the flour just starts to turn golden brown, about 2 minutes. While whisking constantly, pour in a little of the milk. As soon as it thickens (which will be almost immediately), pour in a little more milk. Continue whisking and gradually adding milk in this way until all the milk is added and the

sauce is smooth. Adjust the heat to a very slow simmer and whisk in the mustard, Worcestershire, Tabasco, and ½ teaspoon salt. Simmer for 5 minutes. The sauce will be very thick; whisk frequently to prevent scorching. Whisk in the Gruyère and Asiago until mostly melted and remove the pan from the heat.

Separate the eggs: Collect the five egg whites in a large clean bowl. Add four of the yolks, one at a time, to the cheese sauce. Whisk in each yolk as you add it; discard the remaining yolk or save it for another use. Be sure that no traces of yolk get into the whites.

Whip and fold in the whites: Add a pinch of salt and a pinch of cream of tartar to the whites and beat with an electric mixer (preferably a hand-held) on medium-low speed until the whites are frothy. Increase the speed to high and continue beating until you get almost stiff peaks. Immediately, gently whisk about one-fourth of the whites into the cheese sauce to lighten it. With a rubber spatula, scrape the sauce into the part of the bowl where you removed one-fourth of the whites and gently fold the sauce into the remaining whites with the spatula until the whites are almost completely incorporated (a few small areas of white are fine). Scrape the mixture into the baking dish and sprinkle the remaining 3 tablespoons Parmigiano over the top.

Bake the soufflé: Put the baking dish in the oven and immediately reduce the temperature to 375°F. Bake until the soufflé is puffed and deeply browned, 25 to 30 minutes (don't open the oven door for at least the first 20 minutes). Serve immediately; the soufflé will begin to collapse almost as soon as you take it out of the oven.

favorite gadget



A double-duty thermometer

You may have seen this kind of digital roasting thermometer—it has a metal sensor probe that's attached to a digital readout. The probe stays in the roast while the readout stays outside the oven, allowing you to constantly monitor temperature changes. What's different about this model from Component Design Northwest is that it comes with a metal clip that lets you attach the probe to the side of a saucepan or kettle for a new use as a candy or deep-frying thermometer. Because the readout is outside the pot, it's much easier to see what's going on than with a traditional glass and mercury thermometer. For sources, see p. 82.



tip: If you ever need a small amount of cream cheese for a recipe, look in the dairy case for little 3-ounce bars of Philadelphia brand cream cheese. Many recipes call for exactly this amount, and you won't be left with any forgotten, dried-up remains from a bigger bar.



ingredient

Hoisin sauce

You might recognize hoisin sauce as the reddish-brown condiment that adds a sweet and spicy finishing touch to Chinese dishes like Peking Duck and Mu-Shu Pork. Made of soybeans, vinegar, garlic, sugar, and spices, hoisin sauce is sometimes called Chinese barbecue sauce because its thick texture and concentrated tangy-sweet flavor are a bit like an American barbecue sauce.



How to use it:

Versatile hoisin sauce is great for quick, casual cooking. Try adding it to a stir-fry or brushing it onto meats before broiling, as in the recipe at right. For a light dinner, chop up leftover chicken or pork and wrap it in Boston lettuce leaves with shredded carrots, thinly sliced cucumbers, and a spoonful of hoisin. Or try mixing hoisin sauce with a splash of sesame oil and brushing it on chicken breasts or steaks as they grill. Just be careful when cooking with hoisin over high heat: Its high sugar content means it can burn easily.

Hoisin-Glazed Flank Steak Spirals with Carrot, Red Pepper & Scallions

Serves eight to ten as an hors d'oeuvre.

Pass these colorful little spirals as an hors d'oeuvre, or serve them over greens lightly coated in a sesame-ginger dressing as a first course salad.

- 1 pound flank steak**
- Kosher salt**
- ½ cup hoisin sauce**
- 2 teaspoons Asian chile sauce (like Thai Sriracha) or Tabasco sauce**
- 2 medium carrots, shredded and squeezed dry in a paper towel**
- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut in thin 2-inch long strips**
- 1 bunch scallions (dark green parts only), halved lengthwise if thick and cut in 2-inch lengths**

Set an oven rack about 6 inches away from the element and heat the broiler to high.

Cut the flank steak cross-wise (against the grain) at a very sharp angle (about 30 degrees) to form thin slices of beef between $\frac{1}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide; you should have about 12 long slices of beef. Season the beef with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. Mix the hoisin sauce with the chili sauce and then brush on both sides of the beef. Sprinkle the carrots, red bell pepper, and scallions with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt. Arrange the scallions and peppers in an alternating pattern down the length of each strip of beef. Sprinkle the carrots over the scallions and peppers. Roll the pieces of beef lengthwise into tight spirals and set them, seam side down, on a heavy baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. Brush the tops with some of the remaining hoisin sauce (you may not need all the sauce). Broil the beef until it starts to brown (but doesn't burn) and is firm to the touch, 4 to 6 minutes. Turn off the broiler but let the beef sit in the oven for another 3 minutes so the inside cooks through but is still slightly pink; you can check by slicing into one of the thicker rolls. To serve, insert two or three toothpicks evenly down the length of each roll. Slice between the toothpicks to get bite-size pieces.

How to buy & store it:

Hoisin sauce is sold in the Chinese section of most supermarkets, though there's a noticeable difference in quality and texture between brands. It's worth a visit to an Asian grocer (or see sources on p. 82) to find some of the better ones, which tend to be thicker and have a concentrated, less sweet flavor. Lee Kum Kee brand has a smooth, silky texture, a mellow garlic flavor, and a good balance of sweetness and piquancy. Koon Chun brand has a thicker, paste-like texture and a wonderful spiced flavor. After opening, store hoisin sauce in the refrigerator; it keeps almost indefinitely.

—Tony Rosenfeld, contributing editor

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| Bella Copper | 65 | www.bellacopper.com | p. 83 | Kitchen Knives.com | 3 | www.kitchenknives.com | p. 85 |
| Beryl's Cake Decorating | | www.beryls.com | p. 7 | Kitchen Proven | 63 | www.kitchenproven.com | p. 85 |
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| Beyond Pots and Pans | 47 | www.beyondpotsandpans.com | p. 85 | Kitchen Universe | 108 | www.kitchenuniverse.net | p. 7 |
| The Bowl Company | 27 | www.thebowlcompany.com | p. 84 | Knife Merchant | 10 | www.knifemerchant.com | p. 84 |
| The Bowl Mill | 21 | www.bowlmill.com | p. 13 | Kuhn-Rikon Corporation | 32 | www.kuhnrikon.com/fine | p. 11 |
| Bulk Foods | 18 | www.bulkfoods.com | p. 83 | Kuhn-Rikon Corporation | 31 | www.kuhnrikon.com/fine | p. 25 |
| California Culinary Academy | 33 | www.baychef.com | p. 33 | Kyocera Advanced Ceramics | 97 | www.kyoceraadvancedceramics.com | |
| California Culinary Academy | 95 | www.baychef.com | p. 36 | La Villa Cucina | 90 | www.lavillacucina.com | p. 39 |
| California School of Culinary Arts | | | | Le Cordon Bleu | 39 | www.cordonbleu.edu | p. 17 |
| Caroline's Cakes | 111 | www.carolinescakes.com | p. 17 | Magic Seasoning Blends | 55 | www.chefpaul.com | p. 37 |
| Catacurian | 59 | www.catacurian.com | p. 23 | Maison Glass | 50 | www.maisonglass.com | p. 23 |
| Catacurian | 60 | www.catacurian.com | p. 37 | Merae Asian Tableware | 48 | www.merae.com | p. 23 |
| Catch of the Sea, Inc. | 37 | www.catchofthesea.com | p. 84 | Metrokane | 36 | www.metrokane.com | p. 7 |
| Chef's Resource.com | | www.chefsresource.com | p. 33 | Microplane | 110 | www.microplane.com | p. 23 |
| Chesapeake Bay Gourmet | 45 | www.cbgourmet.com | p. 17 | Mugnaini Imports | 64 | www.mugnaini.com | p. 83 |
| Classic Cookers | | | | Nordic Ware | 112 | www.nordicware.com | p. 17 |
| The Clever Cook | 85 | www.clevercook.com | p. 83 | Notting Hall Tea | 58 | www.nottinghall.com | p. 85 |
| Complements to the Chef | 68 | www.complementstothecook.com | p. 39 | The Pepper Mill | 98 | www.thepeppermillinc.com | p. 85 |
| Cook Street | 26 | www.cookstreet.com | p. 40 | Petaluma Coffee and Tea Co. | 20 | www.petalumacoffee.com | p. 84 |
| Cookbook Publishers | 67 | www.cookbookpublishers.com | p. 83 | Pig Tail Food Flipper | 75 | www.pigtailff.com | p. 17 |
| Cookbooks by Morris Press | 35 | www.morriscookbooks.com | p. 85 | Pillivuyt USA, Inc. | 54 | www.pillivuytus.com | p. 25 |
| Cooking in San Francisco Sweepstakes | | | | Plum's Cooking Co. | 61 | www.plumscooking.com | p. 17 |
| Cuisinart | 81 | www.cuisinart.com | p. 11 | Pots De Creme | 82 | www.potsdecreme.com | p. 85 |
| Cuisinshop.com | 71 | www.cuisinshop.com | p. 23 | Rafal Spice Co. | 44 | www.rafarspicecompany.com | p. 85 |
| Culinard | 106 | www.culinard.com | p. 37 | Replacements, Ltd. | 34 | www.replacements.com | p. 85 |
| The Culinary Institute of America | 77 | www.ciachef.edu | p. 36 | The Restaurant School | 76 | www.walnuthillcollege.edu | p. 37 |
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| Culinary Parts Unlimited | 70 | www.culinaryparts.com | p. 25 | Saeco USA, Inc. | 74 | www.saeco-usa.com | p. 39 |
| Culinary Vacations, Inc. | 96 | www.culinaryvacationsinc.com | p. 36 | Salsa2u | 43 | www.salsa2u.com | p. 85 |
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| CutleryandMore.com | 91 | www.cutleryandmore.com | p. 9 | Scherr's Cabinet & Doors, Inc. | 93 | www.scherrs.com | p. 33 |
| Earthstone Wood-Fire Ovens | 42 | www.earthstoneovens.com | p. 84 | The School of Gourmet Cooking | 88 | | p. 83 |
| Easy Cookin' | 8 | www.easycuin.com | p. 84 | Select Appliance | 38 | www.selectappliance.com | p. 40 |
| Edward Hamilton Bookseller | 30 | www.erhbooks.com/fsk | p. 23 | Silpat by Demarle | 11 | www.demarleusa.com | p. 23 |
| Fagor America, Inc. | 72 | | | Solaire Grills | 5 | www.solaregrills.com | p. 84 |
| Falk Culinair | 104 | www.copperpans.com | p. 23 | Subli-Style | 52 | www.sublistyle.com | p. 83 |
| Food & Wine Trails Tours | 66 | www.foodandwinetrails.com | p. 36 | Sugarcraft, Inc. | 12 | www.sugarcraft.com | p. 83 |
| The French Culinary Institute | 102 | www.frenchculinary.com | p. 37 | Sullivan University | 16 | www.sullivan.edu | p. 37 |
| Frenchbutterdish.com | 22 | www.frenchbutterdish.com | p. 85 | Sullivan University | 16 | www.sullivan.edu | p. 84 |
| The Gadget Source | 4 | www.thegadgetsource.com | p. 83 | Sunburst Trout Company | 40 | www.sunbursttrout.com | p. 85 |
| The Greenbrier | 107 | www.greenbrier.com/culinary | p. 37 | Sur La Table | 49 | www.surlatable.com | p. 13 |
| The Hain Celestial Group | 84 | www.carbfit.com | p. 35 | Taunton's <i>Inspired House</i> | | www.inspiredhouse.com | p. 28 |
| Hand Helpers | 28 | www.handhelpers.com | p. 83 | Tienda.com | 19 | www.tienda.com | p. 84 |
| Hida Tool | 94 | www.hidatool.com | p. 40 | Trenton Bridge Lobster Pound | 2 | www.trentonbridgelobster.com | p. 84 |
| The Institute of Culinary Education | 80 | www.iceculinary.com | p. 37 | USPCA | 15 | www.uspca.com | p. 84 |
| The Ivy Twines, LLC. | 101 | www.theivytwines.com | p. 13 | Upton Tea Imports | 46 | www.uptontea.com | p. 83 |
| Jamison Farms | 23 | www.jamisonfarms.com | p. 83 | Vac Master | 1 | www.aryvacmaster.com | p. 85 |
| | | | | Vermont Soapstone Company | 69 | www.vermontsoapstone.com | p. 13 |
| | | | | WMF of America | 99 | www.wmf-usa.com | p. 39 |
| | | | | William Bounds, Ltd. | 25 | www.wmboundsltd.com | p. 13 |
| | | | | Wusthof Knife | 114 | www.wusthof.com | p. 3 |

tasting panel

Plain Yogurt

With its natural creaminess and distinctive tang, plain yogurt is a key ingredient in some of our favorite soups, sauces, and drinks. To find out which brands are best to use, we invited ten *Fine Cooking* staffers to a blind tasting of eight widely available varieties: four made with low-fat milk, four with whole milk. Tasters rated the appearance, mouth feel, flavor, and overall likability of both types. The two groups were tasted separately because low-fat yogurts tend to be more acidic than whole-milk yogurts, which is why they shouldn't be substituted for each other in recipes. Results are in order of preference for each category.

—*Kimberly Y. Masibay,
associate editor*

Whole-milk yogurt

Listed in order of preference; prices may vary.



1 HORIZON ORGANIC

\$3.29 (32 ounces)

The definitive favorite, this yogurt has a clean milky flavor that's unabashedly tangy but not overly acidic. Its winning feature is its rich, billowy texture, almost as thick as sour cream. For snacking or cooking, you can't go wrong with this "velvety treat." (Contains pectin.)



2 DANNON NATURAL

\$2.19 (32 ounces)

What this excellent yogurt lacks in pizzazz it makes up for in poise. Impeccably balanced, it never hits an off note: The texture is creamy but not overly thick; the flavor pleasantly tangy but moderately so. Try whisking it into spicy sauces and cool soups.



3 BROWN COW

\$2.99 (32 ounces)

If you like tart yogurt, look no further. This one delivers "a big initial tang" (too big for some of our tasters). The dairy flavor is so fresh, you can "almost imagine the cow," and the texture is rich in butterfat, with just a hint of underlying chalkiness.



4 STONYFIELD FARM ORGANIC

\$2.99 (32 ounces)

This yogurt, while souper than the others, is still satisfyingly rich. The flavor, however, has a curious "barnyardy" note and lingers sourly on the palate. (Contains pectin.)

Low-fat yogurt

Listed in order of preference; prices may vary.



1 DANNON PREMIUM

\$2.69 (32 ounces)

Creamy with a slightly chalky finish, this yogurt balances pleasing dairy sweetness with a subtle, persistent tang. "Not super-interesting" on its own, this mellow yogurt is a nice canvas for flavor-packed marinades and sauces. (Contains pectin.)



2 COLOMBO

\$2.65 (32 ounces)

The thickest of the bunch ("maybe too thick"), this yogurt has a pudding-like, slick texture that's not pleasing to every palate. Delightfully sour but short on dairy flavor, it's better suited to eating straight than using in recipes. (Contains cornstarch and pectin.)



3 STONYFIELD FARM ORGANIC

\$2.49 (32 ounces)

Creamy but not overly thick, with minimal chalkiness, this yogurt is dominated by a lemony, "mouth-puckering" tartness. Use in recipes where acidity is desirable. (Contains pectin.)



4 SEVEN STARS FARM ORGANIC

\$3.19 (32 ounces)

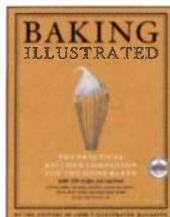
This thin, liquidy yogurt doesn't possess the creamy qualities we expect from yogurt, but its sweet milky flavor is interesting and pronounced, if somewhat short on tang.

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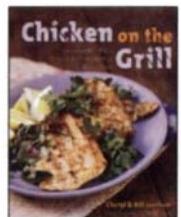
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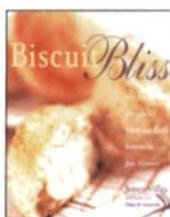
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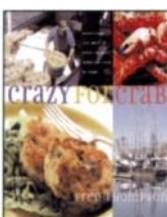
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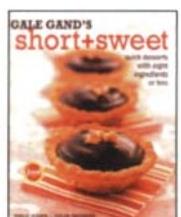
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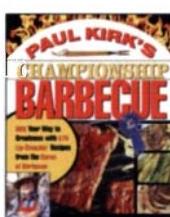
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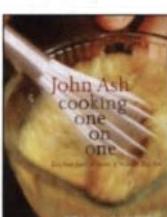
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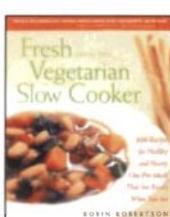
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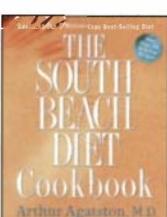
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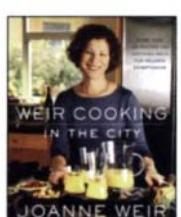
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FROM THE BACK COVER

For more on Ruth Seidler's custom cakes, visit www.jollybebakery.com or call 718-965-1651.

Pork Chops, p. 42

To buy chipotle chile powder, see the sources under Tacos at right.

Potatoes Fondantes, p. 58

Jacques Pepin seasons his potatoes fondantes with fleur de sel, an exquisite French sea salt. To buy it, visit Sur la Table (800 243-0852; www.surlatable.com); a 4.4-ounce container is \$10.95.

Hot pepper jelly

For excellent hot pepper jelly, contact Tierra Vegetables, based in California's Sonoma County wine country. The company sells seven varieties of spicy chile jam, ranging in heat from mild to hot. We liked their Rojo, a brightly flavored jam with a nice balance of sweet and hot, and their smoky, complex Chipotle jam (12-ounce jars are \$8.50 each). To order, contact Tierra Vegetables at 888-784-3772 (www.tierravegetables.com).



Key Lime Pie, p. 72

You don't need Key limes to make a great version of this pie. But if you want to try them, Key limes are becoming increasingly available in supermarkets. You can also order them from Melissa's (800-588-0151; www.melissas.com); a 5-pound bag is \$13.55.

A Savory Stew for Company, p. 60

For 9x3-inch cake pans for the Bourbon Chocolate Cake, check specialty kitchen stores and party stores, or order a Parrish brand pan (\$6.95) from Cooking.com (800-663-8810).

Total brand yogurt is available at natural-foods stores and specialty stores like Whole Foods.

For more information on the dishware pictured, visit Vietri.com. Click on "Dinnerware" and then on "Cucina Fresca."

Tacos, p. 67

Ancho chile powder is often available at well-stocked supermarkets, but if you can't find it, contact A Cook's Wares (www.cookswares.com; 800-915-9788). The company also carries several harder-to-find pure chile powders including pasilla, New Mexico, and chipotle. Corn tortillas are sold in many grocery stores, Hispanic groceries, and specialty stores like Trader Joe's.



Cupcakes, p. 52

For cupcake decorations like dragees, sprinkles, and fancy paper liners, contact Sweet Celebrations (www.sweetetc.com; 800-328-6722).

In Season, p. 22

Spinach grows best in cool weather, so buy your seeds now to sow early. Good mail-order sources include: Burpee Seeds (800-888-1447; www.burpee.com), Park Seed Company (800-213-0076; www.parkseed.com), Stokes Seeds (800-396-9238; www.stokesseeds.com), and Territorial Seed Company (541-942-9547; www.territorial-seed.com).

Equipment, p. 26

All three of the rotary graters we liked are widely available at kitchenware stores and online at Amazon.com.

World Cuisines, p. 32

Visit Templeofthai.com (877-811-8773) for Thai ingredients like lemongrass (8 ounces for \$2.99), sticky rice (\$5.99 for a 5-pound bag), and fish sauce (from \$1.69).

From Our Test Kitchen, p. 74

To order the CDN digital probe thermometer, visit Amazon.com, and look for model DTTC (\$24.99).

Lee Kum Kee hoisin sauce is available in Asian groceries and some supermarkets. To purchase it online, look to The Oriental Pantry (www.orientalpantry.com; 978-264-4576). A 14-ounce bottle sells for \$2.39.

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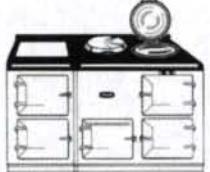
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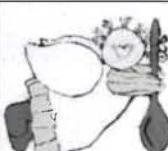
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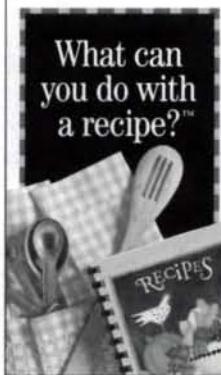
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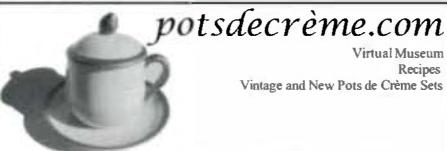
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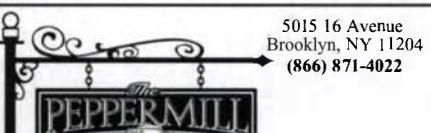


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nutrition information

| Recipe | Page | Calories | | Protein | | Carb | | Fats (g) | | | | Chol. Sodium Fiber | | | Notes |
|--|------|----------|----------|---------|-------|-------|-----|----------|------|------|------|--------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| | | total | from fat | (g) | (g) | total | sat | mono | poly | (mg) | (mg) | (g) | | | |
| (analysis per recipe) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| In Season | 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spinach & Cheese Gratin | | 210 | 120 | 16 | 11 | 13 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 35 | 630 | 3 | | | based on 6 servings |
| World Cuisines | 32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thai Beef Salad with Mint & Cilantro | | 260 | 90 | 31 | 11 | 11 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 65 | 1130 | 2 | | | based on 2 servings |
| Pork Chops | 42 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sautéed Pork Chops with Balsamic Onions | | 400 | 240 | 31 | 7 | 27 | 8 | 15 | 2 | 100 | 1850 | 1 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Coriander-Rubbed Pork Chops w/ Orange Hoisin Sauce | | 520 | 310 | 33 | 16 | 36 | 9 | 18 | 9 | 100 | 2690 | 4 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Spicy Pork Chops with Mango Lime Salsa | | 450 | 250 | 33 | 18 | 28 | 8 | 15 | 4 | 100 | 2440 | 4 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Asparagus | 47 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grilled Asparagus with Fresh Tarragon Mayonnaise | | 350 | 300 | 4 | 8 | 33 | 5 | 25 | 3 | 55 | 290 | 4 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Roasted Asparagus with Buttery Breadcrumbs | | 150 | 70 | 5 | 15 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 10 | 370 | 4 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Boiled Asparagus with Salsa Verde | | 240 | 180 | 7 | 8 | 20 | 3 | 15 | 2 | 15 | 400 | 4 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Sautéed Asparagus with Butter & Parmesan | | 150 | 90 | 7 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 30 | 420 | 4 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Cupcakes | 52 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mocha Chip Cupcakes | | 280 | 130 | 4 | 34 | 15 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 55 | 135 | 2 | | | per cupcake, with frosting |
| Chocolate-Sour Cream Frosting | | 110 | 40 | 1 | 17 | 4.5 | 3.0 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 5 | 30 | 1 | | | based on 12 servings |
| Bite-Size Ginger Cupcakes | | 56 | 25 | 0.5 | 7 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 1.0 | 0 | 15 | 30 | 0 | | | per cupcake, with frosting |
| Lemon-Cream Cheese Frosting | | 35 | 20 | 0 | 4 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 0.5 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | | | based on 36 servings |
| Caramel Cupcakes | | 210 | 80 | 2 | 30 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 60 | 75 | 0 | | | per cupcake, with frosting |
| Butterscotch Frosting | | 130 | 50 | 0 | 21.04 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | | | based on 12 servings |
| Skillet Potatoes | 58 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Potatoes Fondantes | | 190 | 60 | 5 | 27 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 430 | 2 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Dinner with Friends | 60 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goat Cheese Crackers with Hot Pepper Jelly | | 80 | 40 | 4 | 7 | 4.5 | 2.5 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 10 | 105 | 0 | | | based on 8 servings |
| Chicken & Shrimp Ragoût with Curry Spices | | 400 | 170 | 40 | 16.97 | 20 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 200 | 1100 | 2 | | | based on 8 servings |
| Curry Spice Blend | | 45 | 20 | 1 | 8 | 2.0 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0 | 45 | 3 | | | based on 1 serving |
| Toasted Almond Rice | | 310 | 100 | 7 | 43 | 11 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 320 | 3 | | | based on 8 servings |
| Spinach & Cucumber Salad with Yogurt-Mint Dressing | | 75 | 50 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 310 | 2 | | | based on 8 servings |
| Bourbon Chocolate Cake | | 510 | 310 | 6 | 41 | 35 | 21 | 11 | 2 | 200 | 320 | 2 | | | based on 10 servings |
| Authentic Tacos | 67 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grilled Chicken Tacos Alambres | | 410 | 180 | 23 | 33 | 21 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 60 | 910 | 3 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Chili-Rubbed Steak Tacos | | 440 | 220 | 24 | 30 | 24 | 8 | 10 | 2 | 70 | 350 | 3 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Beer-Battered Fish Tacos | | 680 | 390 | 21 | 48 | 44 | 10 | 19 | 9 | 80 | 970 | 4 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Pico de Gallo | | 15 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 200 | 1 | | | per 1/4 cup |
| Tomatillo Salsa | | 15 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 290 | 1 | | | per 2 1/2 tablespoons |
| Guacamole | | 110 | 90 | 1 | 6 | 10 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 200 | 4 | | | per 1/4 cup |
| Key Lime Pie | 72 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| "Key" Lime Pie | | 620 | 250 | 11 | 79 | 28 | 16 | 8 | 3 | 120 | 320 | 1 | | | based on 10 servings |
| From Our Test Kitchen | 74 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Three-Cheese Soufflé | | 250 | 170 | 13 | 6 | 19 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 220 | 450 | 0 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Hoisin-Glazed Flank Steak Spirals | | 120 | 50 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 20 | 440 | 1 | | | based on 10 servings |
| Quick & Delicious | 86C | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Shrimp with Red Chiles, Ginger, Garlic & Scallions | | 370 | 190 | 36 | 10 | 21 | 3 | 14 | 3 | 260 | 700 | 2 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Prosciutto-Wrapped Greens | | 90 | 70 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 15 | 600 | 0 | | | based on 8 servings |
| Pork Medallions in Mushroom Marsala Sauce | | 380 | 190 | 34 | 8 | 21 | 8 | 10 | 2 | 125 | 400 | 1 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Chicken Saltimbocca | | 380 | 200 | 39 | 1 | 23 | 7 | 12 | 2 | 125 | 670 | 1 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Risotto with Peas, Mint & Lemon | | 270 | 90 | 9 | 31 | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 25 | 520 | 3 | | | based on 6 servings |
| Hamburgers with Watercress & Roquefort Butter | | 450 | 200 | 42 | 24 | 22 | 11 | 7 | 2 | 125 | 1310 | 2 | | | based on 4 servings |
| Asparagus Carbonara | | 550 | 190 | 26 | 63 | 19 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 165 | 680 | 5 | | | based on 6 servings |

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of Del Mar, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the

calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the

quantity of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and 1/8 teaspoon salt and 1/16 teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.

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Ruth stabilizes the iced tiers with drinking straws and anchors them with a dowel that goes through the entire cake.



Flowers, sculpted from marzipan, are both beautiful and edible.



Vines and stems are piped with a simple royal icing.

A cake is her canvas

Ruth Seidler, a painter and art conservator, was a devoted home baker for years before deciding to merge her training in fine arts with her passion for pastry and start up a one-woman custom cake business out of her Brooklyn studio. Wedding cakes are a specialty, and they're far from your average white edifice laden with buttercream.

Renaissance decorative art is one of Ruth's inspirations. The bright colors, twisting vines, fanciful flowers, and golden highlights on the cake above are loosely based

on illumination from a French Book of Hours. Underneath the lush, handmade ornamentation, you might find layers of lemon butter cake, almond buttercream, and raspberry-black currant purée, or other irresistible combinations of cake and filling.

"I love the chance to be able to make a cake original," says Ruth, "to express the interests and tastes of the people to be celebrated, rather than just sticking with convention." For more information, see p. 82.

—Amy Albert, senior editor ♦

fine Cooking

50 all-time favorite tips

To mark our tenth anniversary, we looked back at all the readers' tips we've published over the years. Who knew there were so many ways to use zip-top bags? Choosing just fifty favorite tips wasn't easy. The ones that made the final cut are those we use again and again, both here in the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen and at home. We're grateful to all the readers who have shared tips with us, and we're delighted to present you with this collection of our all-time favorites.

—the *Fine Cooking* staff

The Versatile Zip-Top Bag

Wear a plastic bag for greasing pans

I insert my hand into an inside-out zip-top plastic bag, scoop up a bit of soft butter, and use my fingers to rub it into a baking pan's sides and corners. To store the butter for next time, I turn the bag right side out, seal it, and toss it in the freezer.

—Robin Brisco, Tustin, California

Pastry bag in a pinch

To fill mini-muffin cups or madeleine tins, I put the batter in a large, heavy-duty zip-top bag, seal, and snip a 3/4-inch opening in one corner of the bag. Then I pipe the batter into the prepared baking tins. No messy drips or batter spills.

—Ray L. Overton III,
Alpharetta, Georgia

Pound meat in a freezer bag

Freezer bags are great for pounding boneless meats like chicken or veal cutlets. The bag

is strong enough to prevent liquid or bits of meat from spilling onto my countertop. Even the pounding tool stays clean. I pound whole spices in a bag, too.

—John Wilson, Houston, Texas

Pit cherries in a bag

I pit cherries in a heavy-duty plastic bag. This prevents juice from splattering and keeps all the pits and stems in one bag for easy disposal.

—Vicki McLain, Baytown, Texas



Easier Ways to Work with Ginger and Garlic

Use a spoon to peel ginger

To peel fresh ginger without sacrificing the flavorful flesh, scrape the skin with the edge of a teaspoon's bowl, applying gentle pressure.

—Walter J. Morrison III,
Buffalo, New York

Blanch garlic for easier peeling

To peel a few cloves of garlic, I just crack them with the side of my chef's knife. But if I have a lot of garlic to peel, it's easier to blanch the cloves in boiling water for 15 seconds, scoop them out and shock them in a bowl of ice water. The skin then slips right off.

—Robert Danhi,
Hyde Park, New York

Make garlic smell disappear

After working with garlic, wet your hands, and rub them on your stainless-steel sink or faucet for a few seconds.

—Diane Rathman,
St. Louis Park, Minnesota

The Joys of Freezing

Partially freeze meat to make slicing easy

It's easier to slice raw flank steak thinly if you freeze the meat for about 15 minutes first. This also works with slab bacon or any cut of raw meat that needs to be sliced before cooking.

—Gail Shem-Lee,
Martinez, California

Freeze homemade breadcrumbs

When good bread goes stale, I get out my food processor and chop away. I store the homemade breadcrumbs in a heavy-duty zip-top bag in my freezer and scoop them out whenever I need crumbs for a recipe. They thaw almost instantly.

—Mary Napoleone,
Pensacola, Florida

Freezer labels—just use them

Everyone knows that you're supposed to label a bag or container of food with its contents and the date before sticking it in the freezer. But it always seemed like a big hassle to me—until I stashed adhesive labels and permanent markers in my silverware drawer and disciplined myself to go to the drawer before the freezer. I'll never return to my old ways now that I've found how satisfying it is to pull out a container of unidentifiable something from the freezer and know definitively that it's "Lamb stew, 2/1/04" or "Checkerboard cookie dough, 3/6/04."

—Carol Spinelli,
Atlanta, Georgia

Vegetable Tricks



Peel asparagus without breaking it

When I peel asparagus, I rest the spear on the bottom of an upside-down saucepan. This way, I can grasp the tip and rotate the spear as I peel; plus, the pot supports the spear so that it doesn't snap in two from the pressure of the peeler.

—Wayne Armentrout,
McLean, Virginia

Wilt spinach in a colander

Fresh spinach cooks so quickly; it seems wasteful to bring a full pot of water to a boil, only to dip in the spinach and take it right out again. Instead, I put the leaves in a colander (after washing well to remove grit) while I heat water in my teakettle. I then pour the boiling water onto the spinach and let it drain right in the sink.

—Catherine Kelley,
Watertown, Massachusetts

A doneness test for artichokes

When boiling or steaming whole artichokes, check for doneness by pulling on the top of an interior leaf with tongs. If the leaf comes free under the artichoke's weight, it's done. If the leaf needs coercion to break loose, it needs more cooking.

—Diane Chesterton,
Kansas City, Missouri

New Jobs for Old Tools

Baby your mushrooms

Instead of a mushroom brush, I use a soft-bristled baby hair brush. Mine says "It's a boy!" on it, but my mushrooms don't seem to mind.

—Russ Shumaker,
Richmond, Virginia

Melon baller scoops out apple cores

You can use a melon baller to neatly scoop out the cores of halved or quartered pears and apples. It's faster and easier than a paring knife.

—Lillian Main,
Victoria, British Columbia

Roasting pan as pancake griddle

I straddle a heavy-duty flame-proof roasting pan (mine is nonstick) over two burners and use it as a griddle for pancakes, French toast, eggs, and breakfast meats.

—Tiny Shuster,
St. Johnsburg, New York

Scissors chop tomatoes in the can

To quickly and neatly chop whole canned tomatoes, cut them right in the can with kitchen shears.

—Jeannie McDermott,
Roeland Park, Kansas

Two Are Better Than One

Two skewers keep kebabs secure

Kebabs of meat, shrimp, or vegetables cook more evenly and are easier to turn if you pierce the food with two parallel skewers. This way, when you turn the kebab with tongs, the food doesn't spin around the axis of a single skewer.

—Brian Patterson,
Silver Spring, Maryland

Simulate a simmer burner on a gas stove

Delicate custards and cream-based soups require low, even heat under the pan. Professional ranges have a simmer burner just for this purpose. If the lowest setting on your gas burner just isn't low enough, take a grate from a burner that isn't in use and stack it on top of the burner you want to use for simmering.

—Milton Lai,
Forest Hills, New York

Dental Floss in the Kitchen

Perfectly sliced cheesecake

Don't use a knife to slice cheesecake. Instead, wrap the ends of a long piece of unwaxed dental floss (or fishing line) around your middle fingers, stretch the line taut, and push it through the center of the cake to slice it in half. Let go of the floss with one hand, and with the other, pull the floss out of the cake, as close to the plate as possible. Wipe the floss clean before making the next slice.

—John Palioian,
Newtown, Connecticut

Cutting soft cheese

To cut neat medallions from a log of soft goat cheese (or other soft cheese), stretch a piece of unwaxed dental floss taut and saw it through the cheese.

—Cameron Butler,
Lewes, Delaware

Prettier Cakes & Cookies

Frost the cake, not the plate

To neatly frost a cake, anchor the bottom to the center of the cake plate with a dab of frosting or jam. Then slip strips of waxed paper or parchment under the cake, all the way around. Remove them when you've finished frosting the cake.

—Mary Sullivan,
Concord, California

Align cake layers perfectly

I like to cut a single cake into two layers and add a filling before icing the cake. To ensure a level cake, even if I don't make a level cut, I stick a toothpick into the side of the cake near the top and another one near the bottom directly under the first. Then after I cut and fill the cake, I simply align the toothpicks and set the top back on.

—Betsy Schwartz,
Greenwich, Connecticut



Keeping cookies in shape

To keep icebox-cookie dough from flattening on one side while lying in the fridge, I wrap the dough with waxed paper and slide it into a cardboard paper-towel tube. When I remove the dough from the fridge and slice the cookies, I get perfect rounds every time.

—Maria Olaguera-Delogu,
Outremont, Quebec

Storing and Using Fresh Greens and Herbs

Improvise a salad spinner

It's easy to make a salad spinner out of a cotton pillowcase and a little centrifugal force. Put the rinsed greens in the pillowcase and take them outside. Grasp the open end of the case in one hand and spin the case like a lasso over your head. After about 30 seconds, the greens will be dry. It looks a little silly, but it's incredibly efficient when you're making lots of salad.

—Mark Petroni,
Weston, Connecticut

Stripping thyme leaves

Don't pluck thyme leaves one by one. Instead, pinch the top of a sprig and run the thumb and forefinger of your other hand down the length of the stem, stripping off leaves as you go. This technique also works for marjoram, oregano, and tender sprigs of rosemary.

—Marian Brown,
Sherman Oaks, California

Season butter with leftover herbs

I combine leftover herbs with cold unsalted butter in my food processor. Then I shape the butter into small logs, wrap each one well in plastic wrap, and store them in the freezer. These herb butters are great for flavoring pasta, grilled fish or meat, and sauces.

—Antoinne Rimes,
San Francisco, California

Keep herbs in plain sight

I don't like to store fresh herbs in a produce drawer---out of sight, out of mind. When I get home from the store, I untie the herbs, put the stems in a tall mug of water, cover the top loosely with a plastic bag, and put the whole "bouquet" in the fridge. This not only keeps the herbs fresh, it encourages me to use them. Scallions like this treatment too.

—Patricia A. Janney,
Kingston, New York

Citrus Smarts

A better way to zest

Nothing beats a rasp (like the Microplane) for zesting citrus. I used to run a lime or lemon down the length of the rasp, but that method didn't let me see how much zest I was removing. Now I hold the fruit in one hand and hold the rasp like a nail file on top of the fruit, moving the rasp, not the fruit. This lets me see exactly what I'm zesting.

—Joan McAllister,
Brookfield, Connecticut

Massage citrus for more juice

To get the most juice from a citrus fruit, roll it back and forth on the counter, pressing hard with the heel of your hand. This crushes the juice cells within the membranes and gets the juices flowing.

—Meg Perry, Akron, Ohio

Pan Handling

Perfecting the flip

I love how professional chefs toss food in their skillets with just a flick of the wrist. To practice the technique at home, fill a zip-top bag with rice or dried beans and toss the weighted bag in a skillet until you feel confident enough to try it with real food.

—Anthony Lucas,
Toledo, Ohio

Warning: Hot pot

After removing a pot from the oven, I always wrap a kitchen towel around the handle. This ensures that anyone who tries to pick up the pot won't get burned.

—Howard Goldberg,
Manalapan, New Jersey

Tidy Solutions

Nonskid cutting board

Lay a slightly damp dishtowel (or moist paper towel) underneath your cutting board to prevent skidding and to absorb any juices that run off from your food.

—Morgan Gallagher,
Cleveland, Ohio

End plastic-bag clutter with a cardboard tube

A cardboard paper-towel tube is the perfect holder for those plastic bags you take home from the produce department. Just stuff the bags in one end and pull them out the other.

You can also wrap stray rubber bands around the outside of the tube.

—Bill Apodoca & Cheryl Keller,
Royal Oak, Michigan

Plastic wrap keeps the processor lid clean

To keep the top of your food processor clean while you're processing, stretch a piece of plastic wrap over the bowl before putting on the lid. This works like a charm on processing jobs that don't require use of the feed tube.

—Christina Stuccio,
Weehawken, New Jersey

Measuring Ideas

Cooks need rulers, too

I always keep a ruler in a kitchen drawer and another with my wooden spoons on the counter. This way, one is always handy when I need to measure a baking dish or check the size of diced vegetables.

—Ellen Sandberg,
North Vancouver,
British Columbia

Oil the cup before measuring honey

Before measuring sticky ingredients like molasses or honey, coat the inside of your measuring cup with a film of canola oil. The sticky liquid will slide out and leave a perfectly empty measuring container.

—Janet C. deCarteret,
Bellevue, Washington

Mark the volume

After I buy a baking pan, I mark its volume on the back with a permanent marker. To measure the volume of an old pan, fill it with water to within $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the rim and pour the water into a liquid measuring cup that's marked with cup measurements and fluid ounces.

—Jane Becktel, via email

What's "halfway"?

To take the guesswork out of a recipe direction that states, "boil down the liquid by one-half," I stick the handle of a wooden spoon into the pan and mark the original depth of the liquid on the handle. As the liquid boils down, I put the handle into the pan from time to time to check when the liquid is at half the original mark.

—Ruby Thomas,
Anacortes, Washington

Softening Hard Butter

Get out the grater

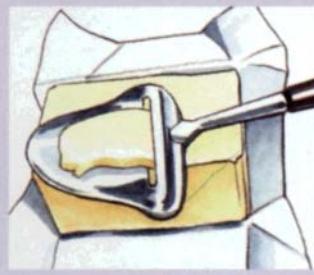
To quickly soften rock-hard butter, grate it into a mixing bowl. It will soon come to room temperature.

—Suzanne Campodonico,
Menlo Park, California

Use a cheese plane

Run a cheese plane across a stick of cold butter for a thin, quick-melting ribbon of butter—perfect for toast.

—Philippa Farrar,
Santa Barbara, California



Stocks, Soups, and Sauces

A paper towel degrades stock

You can use a paper towel to remove the very last trace of fat from stock. Put the warm stock in a wide pan or bowl. Lay a sheet of paper towel over the surface of the stock. (If you have a two-ply sheet, separate it and use only one layer.) Immediately draw it up toward you and away from the stock. Have the trash can nearby for disposal of the dripping towel. Repeat with fresh sheets until no fat is visible on the stock.

—Blair Sanders,
Dallas, Texas

Chill stew in the snow

Last winter I needed to cool a large pot of beef stew, and the thick layer of pure white snow on my picnic table

outside seemed to be the perfect spot. I took the hot pot outside and set it on the table, packing snow around the pot. I gave the stew a stir, covered it loosely, and went back indoors. Every fifteen minutes or so, I'd give the pot a stir and pack more snow around it until the stew was cool enough to refrigerate.

—Sadie Ann Smart,
Brookfield, Connecticut

Keeping delicate sauces warm

To keep delicate sauces such as beurre blanc or béarnaise warm and prevent breaking or curdling for up to two hours, store them in a Thermos.

—Rhonda Abel,
Charlotte, North Carolina

Easier Clean-up

Use cold water to wash off cheese

After shredding mozzarella in the food processor, it's easier to clean the blade and bowl if you treat the sticky cheese like molten candle wax. Whereas hot water spreads, stretches, and gums up cheese in the blade holes, very cold water hardens the cheese so it comes right off.

—Ana Weerts, Brookfield, Wisconsin

Safely clean a food-processor blade

To get food remnants off a food processor blade without endangering your fingers, empty the work bowl, but don't worry about getting it all. Reassemble the processor and pulse the blade several times. The food bits will fly off the blade onto the side of the work bowl.

—Georgene Hawkins-Kunz,
Fircrest, Washington

Toss sponges in the dishwasher

The last items that go into my dishwasher before I turn it on are my kitchen sponges. They come out clean and fresh.

—Lisa Jung, San Rafael, California

In a Pinch: What to Substitute

Cheese replaces raw eggs

The traditional way to bind oil and vinegar into an emulsified Caesar salad dressing is by beating in a raw egg. Instead of egg, I mix several tablespoons of finely grated hard cheese (like Asiago) into the oil and vinegar to make a thick dressing.

—Jim Rowell, Duluth, Minnesota

Use vegetables as a roasting rack

To keep a roast off the bottom of a roasting pan that doesn't have a metal rack, set the meat atop several celery ribs and peeled carrots, halved lengthwise.

—R. B. Himes, Vienna, Ohio

Make your own buttermilk

When I need buttermilk for a recipe, I make my own by adding 1 tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice to 1 cup room-temperature whole milk and letting it stand for 5 minutes.

—Dale Conoscenti, Montpelier, Vermont

quick & delicious

BY TASHA PRYSI-DESERIO

Fresh herbs give extra punch to many of these springtime recipes. To get the most from delicate herbs, handle them with care. Wash them by submerging them gently in a bowl of water and swirling them; after several changes of water, no grit should fall to the bottom of the bowl. Dry the herbs with paper towels or a salad spinner and pick them over, removing any fibrous stems or damaged leaves. Chop the leaves with a very sharp knife to prevent bruising. For more herb handling tips, see "Fifty All-Time Favorite Tips" on p. 18C.



Shrimp with Red Chiles, Ginger, Garlic & Scallions

Serves four.

- 1½ lb. large shrimp, peeled and deveined**
- Kosher salt**
- 5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- 2 fresh red hot chiles (such as Fresno or jalapeño), cored, seeded, and thinly sliced**
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh ginger**
- 2 bunches scallions (about 16), trimmed and sliced on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces**
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro**
- 1½ Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste**

Heat a large sauté pan over high heat for 1 minute. Season the shrimp with ½ tsp. salt. Pour 2 Tbs. of the oil into the pan and then add the shrimp, garlic, chiles,

and ginger. Sauté, tossing frequently, until the shrimp brown and are no longer translucent, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Add another 2 Tbs. oil, the scallions, and ¼ tsp. salt to the pan. Sauté the scallions until they wilt and begin to brown, about 2 minutes. Return the shrimp to the pan and toss well for 30 seconds. Remove from the heat and stir in the cilantro, lemon juice, and the remaining 1 Tbs. oil. Taste and add more salt and lemon juice, if needed. Serve immediately.

Serving suggestion:
Serve over steamed jasmine rice.



Chicken Saltimbocca

Serves four.

4 boneless skinless chicken breast halves (about 1½ lb. total)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

2 Tbs. unsalted butter

24 fresh sage leaves

4 very thin slices prosciutto, cut crosswise into thin strips

½ cup dry white wine (like Pinot Grigio)

1 cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth

If the tenders are still attached to the chicken breasts, remove them and reserve for another use. Trim any excess fat from the chicken. Cover the breasts with plastic wrap and pound with a smooth meat mallet (or a heavy sauté pan) until they're evenly ½ inch thick. Season with ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper.

Heat the olive oil and 1 Tbs. of the butter in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. When the butter is foaming, set two of the chicken breasts in the pan and sear without moving until golden

brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Flip the chicken and cook until firm to the touch and cooked through, about another 3 minutes. Transfer to a platter and repeat with the other two breasts. Add the sage leaves and prosciutto to the pan and cook until crisp and slightly browned, about 1 minute. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels.

Pour the fat from the pan, set the pan over high heat, and add the wine. Boil, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon, until the wine is almost completely reduced. Add the chicken broth and boil until it's reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Return the chicken to the pan, stir in the remaining 1 Tbs. butter, and cook for 1 minute to heat through. Serve the chicken with the sauce, sprinkled with the sage and prosciutto.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with mashed potatoes.



Pork Medallions in Mushroom Marsala Sauce

Serves four to six.

2 lb. pork tenderloin (about 2 tenderloins)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

2 medium shallots, finely diced

12 oz. cremini mushrooms, thinly sliced

1 Tbs. all-purpose flour

½ cup dry Marsala

1 cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth

3 Tbs. heavy cream

¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Trim the tenderloins of silver-skin and any excess fat. Cut the tenderloins into 2-inch-thick medallions. Flip each medallion onto a cut side and press down with the palm of your hand to flatten slightly. Season the meat with ¾ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. black pepper.

Heat the olive oil and 1 Tbs. of the butter in a large sauté pan over high heat. When the butter is melted and foaming, add half of the meat and sear until nicely browned, 2 to 3 minutes. Flip and cook the other side until the meat is well browned and slightly firm to the touch, about another 2 min-

utes. Transfer to a plate and repeat with the remaining pork.

Melt the remaining 2 Tbs. butter in the pan. Add the shallots and a pinch of salt and sauté for about 30 seconds, using a wooden spoon to scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the mushrooms and sauté until all of the mushroom liquid has evaporated and the mushrooms are golden, about 3 minutes. Season with ½ tsp. salt, sprinkle with the flour, and add the Marsala. Once the Marsala has almost completely evaporated, add the chicken broth and reduce by half, about 3 minutes. Stir in the cream and parsley, return the pork and any accumulated juices to the pan, and cook, flipping the pork once, until it's firm to the touch and still a little pink in the middle (cut into a piece to check), 2 to 4 minutes. Taste for salt and pepper and serve.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with buttered baby potatoes.



Hamburgers with Watercress & Roquefort Butter

Serves four.

- 1½ lb. ground beef (preferably chuck)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 oz. Roquefort cheese, crumbled (a generous ½ cup)**
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened at room temperature**
- 4 hamburger buns or kaiser rolls, split**
- 4 very thin slices red onion**
- 1 cup loosely packed watercress sprigs, rinsed, tough stems removed**

Heat the oven to 400°F. Season the beef with salt and pepper and shape it into four patties about 1 inch thick. Season both sides of each patty with salt and pepper.

In a small bowl, mix the Roquefort and butter with a rubber spatula.

Heat a large, heavy sauté

pan over medium-high heat for 1 minute. Set the hamburgers in the pan, reduce the heat to medium, and cook until well browned on the first side, 4 to 5 minutes. Flip the burgers and cook to your liking: another 4 minutes for medium rare, or another 6 minutes for medium.

Meanwhile, toast the buns or rolls, split sides up, on a baking sheet in the oven until crusty and very light gold, 6 to 8 minutes. Spread both sides of each bun with about 1 Tbs. of the Roquefort butter. Serve the hamburgers on the toasted buns, topped with the onion and watercress.



Asparagus Carbonara

Serves four to six.

- 1½ lb. asparagus**
- 4 slices bacon, sliced crosswise into ¼-inch wide strips**
- 1 medium yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced**
- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 lb. dried penne rigate**
- 4 large eggs***
- 3 oz. (1 cup) freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano; more for serving**

Put a large pot of salted water on to boil.

Trim the tough bottom ends from the asparagus and cut the spears diagonally into 1-inch segments. In a large sauté pan, cook the bacon over medium heat until light golden brown, about 10 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a plate lined with paper towels, leaving as much fat in the pan as possible. Add the onion to the pan, and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high and continue to cook, stirring frequently, until the onion browns around the edges, another 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl, return the pan to medium-high heat, and add the oil. As soon as the oil is

hot, add the asparagus, sprinkle with ¼ tsp. salt, and cook, stirring frequently, until the asparagus is crisp-tender and brown in spots, 3 to 5 minutes. Keep warm.

Cook the penne in the boiling water, stirring occasionally, until al dente, 8 to 10 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk the eggs with ¼ tsp. salt in a small bowl and then stir in the Parmigiano until well blended. Drain the pasta. In a large serving bowl, immediately toss the hot pasta with the egg and cheese mixture. Add the asparagus, onion, and bacon, and toss well. Season with a generous amount of pepper and toss well again. Serve with a sprinkling of the Parmigiano.

* The eggs in the recipe may not be cooked sufficiently to eliminate all risk of salmonella; if you're cooking for small children, the elderly, or anyone with a compromised immune system, use a pasteurized egg product instead.

great starter



Prosciutto-Wrapped Greens

Serves eight.

- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp. red-wine vinegar
- 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. Dijon mustard
- ¼ lb. mesclun or arugula, washed and spun dry
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 Tbs. freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- 12 thin slices prosciutto

In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil, vinegar, lemon juice, and mustard. Put the mesclun or arugula in a medium bowl and season with a generous pinch of salt and pepper. Add the Parmigiano to the greens and gently toss with just enough of the vinaigrette to coat the greens lightly. Taste for salt and pepper.

Set a slice of prosciutto on a work surface and put a small handful of greens at the narrow end of the meat.

Squeeze the greens together and roll the prosciutto into a tight log. Cut the log into 2-inch pieces on the diagonal (two or three pieces, depending on the width of the prosciutto). Repeat with the remaining prosciutto and greens and serve.

Tip: If the prosciutto is very long, cut each piece in half crosswise first.

5 to 6 cups homemade or low-salt chicken broth
4 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 medium onion, cut into ¼-inch dice
Kosher salt
2 cups arborio rice (or other risotto rice)
½ cup dry white wine (like Pinot Grigio)
2 cups frozen peas
½ cup chopped fresh mint
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1 Tbs. finely grated lemon zest
¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano; more for serving

Heat the chicken broth in a saucepan over medium-high heat until very hot and then reduce the heat to keep the broth hot. In another wide, heavy saucepan, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and a generous pinch of salt and sauté, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until the onion softens and starts to turn lightly golden, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the rice and stir until the grains are well coated with butter and the edges become

Risotto with Peas, Mint & Lemon

Serves four as a main course or six as a side dish.

translucent, 1 to 2 minutes. Pour in the wine and stir until it's absorbed, about 1 minute. Add another generous pinch of salt and ladle enough of the hot broth into the pan to barely cover the rice, about 1 cup. Bring to a boil and then adjust the heat to maintain a lively simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the broth has been mostly absorbed, 2 to 3 minutes. Continue adding broth in ½-cup increments, stirring and simmering, until it has been absorbed each time, at intervals of about 2 to 3 minutes.

After about 16 to 18 minutes, the rice should be creamy but still fairly firm. At this point, add the peas and another ½ cup broth. Continue to simmer and stir until the peas are just cooked and the rice is just tender to the tooth, another 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in another splash of broth if the risotto is too thick. Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the mint, lemon juice, lemon zest, the remaining 2 Tbs. butter, and the Parmigiano. Season with salt to taste. Serve the risotto immediately with a sprinkling of Parmigiano.

Tasha Prys-Deserio cooked at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, for five years. Now she teaches and writes about food. ♦